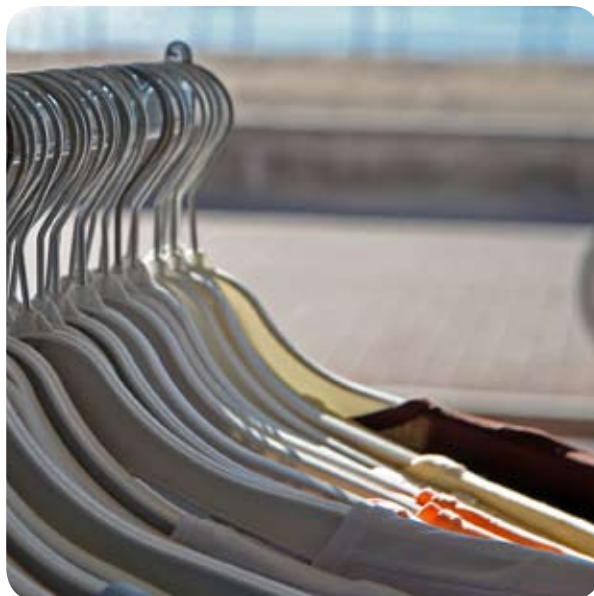




EUROPEAN COMMISSION



ECC-Net
The European Consumer Centres Network
2007 ANNUAL REPORT



More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://europa.eu>).

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

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1 FOREWORD



Recognising consumers as essential, responsible economic actors in the Internal Market is one of the key principles of European consumer policy. Consumers should be empowered to make informed choices about the goods and services that they purchase. Their interests should be promoted and defended, particularly in view of the increasing complexity of the markets in which they operate.

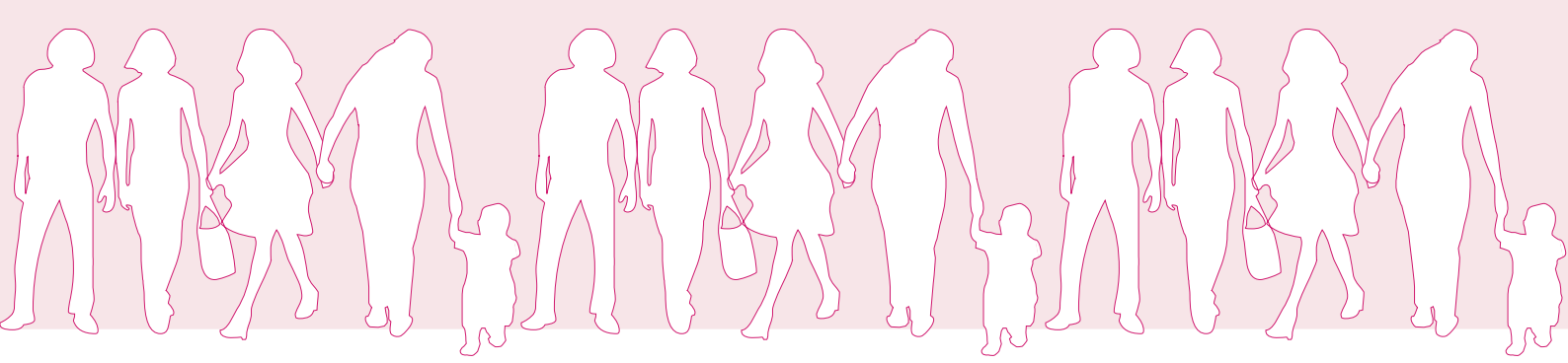
The a (ECC-Net) is a key tool in providing consumers with information and direct help with cross-border problems. The ECC-Net provides a full service to consumers from information to dispute resolution to enable them to take full advantage of the internal market, without risk to their health, safety or economic interests. The Network provides consumers with a “one stop shop” for information and advice on shopping across-borders. The ECC-Net also assists in resolving cross-border complaints with traders, and helps consumers to gain access to appropriate Alternative Dispute Resolution schemes. The Commission, together with the Member States, finances its operation.

The present report describes the functioning of the ECC-Net in 2007 and includes detailed information about the main ECC-Net events as well as some examples of last year’s success stories in solving concrete consumer problems. A short analysis of the main sectors dealt by the network is also included.

I am glad to report that the ECC-Net is already the best known Commission Network and that its activities and the number of cases dealt with have continued to increase steadily in the past year. In addition this report also describes how the ECC-Net is establishing closer relationships with other networks run by the Commission in order to improve efficiency and also to help consumers get the appropriate redress. Finally, the report provides us with information about the joint projects carried out by the Network in 2007.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure the staff of the Centres, the Member States and the host organisations of the Commission’s continuing support to their work. Their valuable contribution is essential to the smooth running of the Network’s activities. I believe that the ECC-Net has become one of our key tools to empower citizens, allowing them to take full advantage of their rights as European Consumers.

Meglana Kuneva
European Commissioner for Consumers



2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2007 European Consumer Centre Network (ECC-Net) Annual Report provides a snapshot of activities carried out by European Commission and EU Member State-sponsored ECCs in 2007. For the 2007-2008 period, the Commission is providing €8.5 million in funding to ECCs with grants. With the enlargement of the EU to ECC Bulgaria and ECC Romania at the end of 2007, the ECC-Netnow consists of 29 European Consumer Centres: all 27 EU Member States plus Iceland and Norway.

ECCs provide for help in business-to-consumer disputes when citizens shop cross-border either in person or through distance selling (mainly on-line). The Report indicates that last year ECCs handled 55.000 contacts with consumers. The highest number of information requests and cases was addressed by Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, and Italy.

Most complaints tackled by ECCs concern contract terms (25%), product and service (22.4%), and delivery (20%). Most problems concerning contract terms are related to rescission of contracts (70%). Cooling-off periods represent 19% while unfair contract terms account for 7%. Complaints on product and service are mainly about defective items (49%). 27% of product and service-related complaints focus on non conformity. As far as the "delivery" category is concerned, statistics for 2007 show that 71% of complaints were about the lack of delivery altogether! Delays represent 18% of cases.

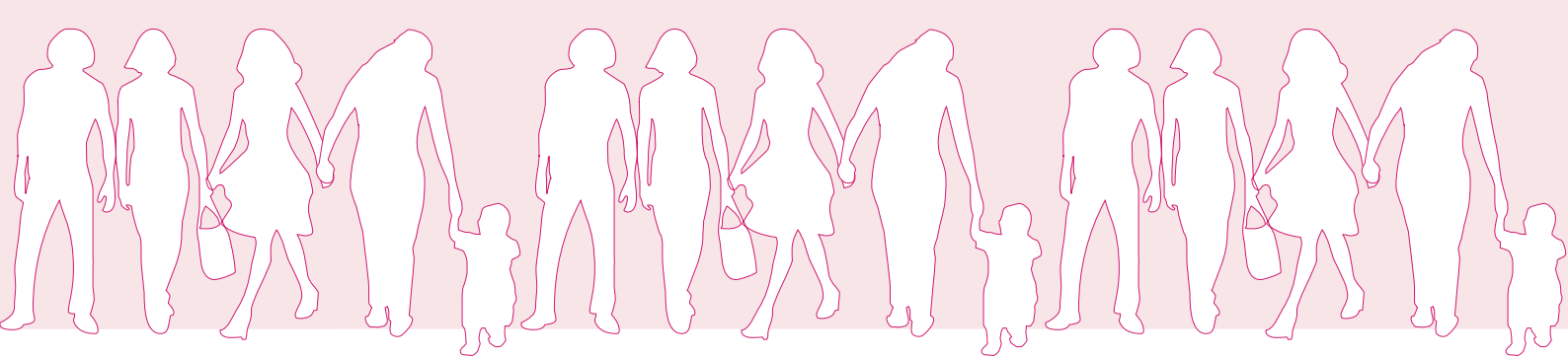
22% of complaints recorded by the European Consumer Centres dealt with transport services and notably air passenger rights, followed by recreational and culture services (almost 12% of the complaints) and then by audio-visual services (almost 10%). More than half of complaints concern on-line transactions (55%). Sales in shops and other commercial venues ("on the premises") involve 24.7% of the cases. Distance selling only amounts to 9%.

Apart from handling information requests and complaints, ECCs have been running joint projects, such as a review of complaints regarding air passenger rights (project carried out by ECC Belgium, Ireland and Sweden), "Howard" the on-line shopping assistant (coordinated by ECC Denmark and with participation of Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and UK) and an information campaign with leaflets on tourism (15 Centres including ECC Spain, Germany, Cyprus and France as coordinators), leading to a "Conference on tourism and consumer protection in the Mediterranean, which took place on 30-31 October, in Torremolinos (Spain).

CONCRETE "SUCCESS STORIES"

Cypriot consumer - UK trader – cancellation of flight

A Cypriot consumer booked an air ticket through the website of an airline company in the United Kingdom. The airline confirmed the reservation. Later on, the airline informed the consumer that due to operational reasons they had found it necessary to withdraw his flight. The company proposed a new date which was not convenient for the consumer so he decided to cancel the flight. When the consumer tried to follow the options given by the airline for cancellation with full refund of his money, he found out that he should pay an extra amount of €256 in order to be allowed to cancel his booking. He made several efforts to contact the Reservations department of the company with no success. After submitting his complaint to ECC Cyprus and sharing the case with ECC UK, an amicable settlement was found. The consumer did not have to pay extra money for canceling his flight and furthermore he was reimbursed the price of the flight.



ECCs also ran information campaigns on Alternative Dispute Resolution, including out-of-court settlements, with a series of workshops and seminars. They were also key organisers of the European Consumer Day (15 March 2007), and of other awareness-raising initiatives such as the campaign on the EU Timeshare Directive, the “You choose!” campaign on the opening of national energy markets, the new “Euro-tariff” GSM roaming legislation, and other information actions.

For more information please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress_cons/index_en.htm

3 THE ECC-NetWORK

3.1. Background

The European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net) is an EU-wide network that – free of charge – provides information on cross-border shopping to consumers, ensures that they are aware of their rights and gives support in the event of a complaint.

With the accession of ECC Bulgaria and ECC Romania at the end of 2007, the ECC-Net already consists of 29 European Consumer Centres: all 27 EU Member States plus Iceland and Norway.

The ECC-Net is co-financed – through grants – by the EU and the participating countries. For the period covering the actions undertaken in 2007-2008, the EU contributed over €8.5 million to support the ECCs. According to the Consumer Programme¹ the host organisations must be a public body or a non-profit-making body designated by the Member State or the competent authority concerned and agreed by the European Commission².

3.2. Services provided by the ECC-Net

The services provided by the ECC-Net to consumers concentrate on business-to-consumer problems that occur when citizens shop cross-border either in person or via distance purchase (mainly e-commerce).

- The ECC-Net informs consumers on both EU and national rules.
- The ECC-Net gives advice and support to individuals facing a consumer-related cross-border problem.
- The ECC-Net helps consumers who have a complaint which is not solved amicably between the consumer and the trader to reach an agreement via an out-of-court dispute resolution mechanism (Alternative Dispute Resolution - ADR).
- The ECC-Net co-operates in civil and commercial matters with other EU-wide networks, such as the FIN-NET, SOLVIT and the European Judicial Network.
- The ECC-Net provides valuable input for the European Commission on consumer policy issues.

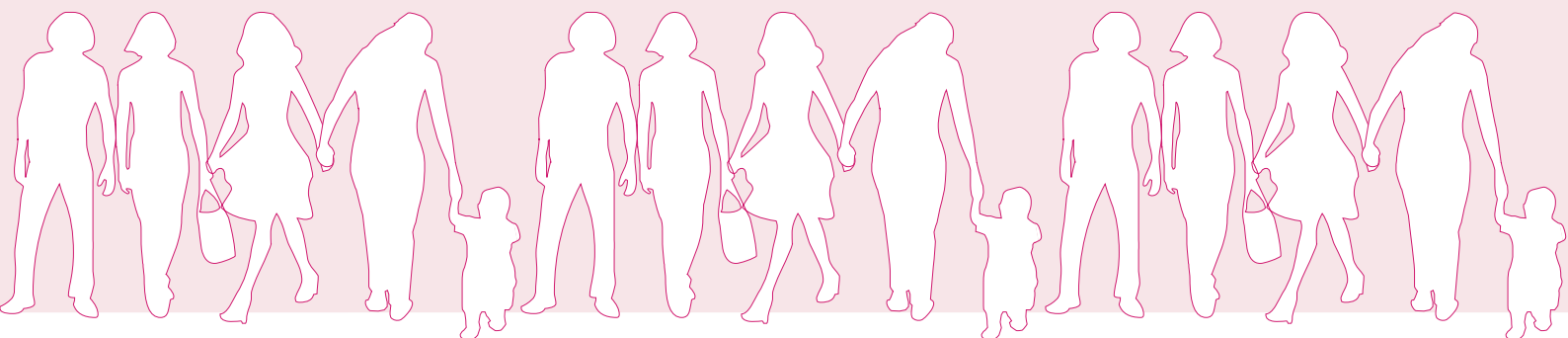
CONCRETE “SUCCESS STORIES”

Finnish consumer - Estonian trader – defective good

A Finnish consumer purchased a coffee maker from Estonia for around €100. At home in Finland the consumer noticed that the coffee maker was defective. At first the consumer started to look for a representative of the relevant brand in Finland to solve the problem. Since the model was not available in Finland the consumer contacted the trader in Estonia. Unfortunately the trader and the consumer did not come to an agreement, so the consumer contacted ECC Finland who shared the complaint with ECC Estonia. The Estonian Centre contacted the trader and the agreement was reached: the trader would either replace the coffee maker or reimburse the costs provided that the consumer delivered the product to the store, to see whether the coffee-maker was defective or not. The coffee maker was sent by post and examined by the trader: the coffee maker was indeed defective. Thanks to the intervention of ECC Finland and Estonia, the trader reimbursed the cost of the product and delivery as well.

1 Decision No. 1926/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 establishing a programme of Community action in the field of consumer policy (2007-2013)

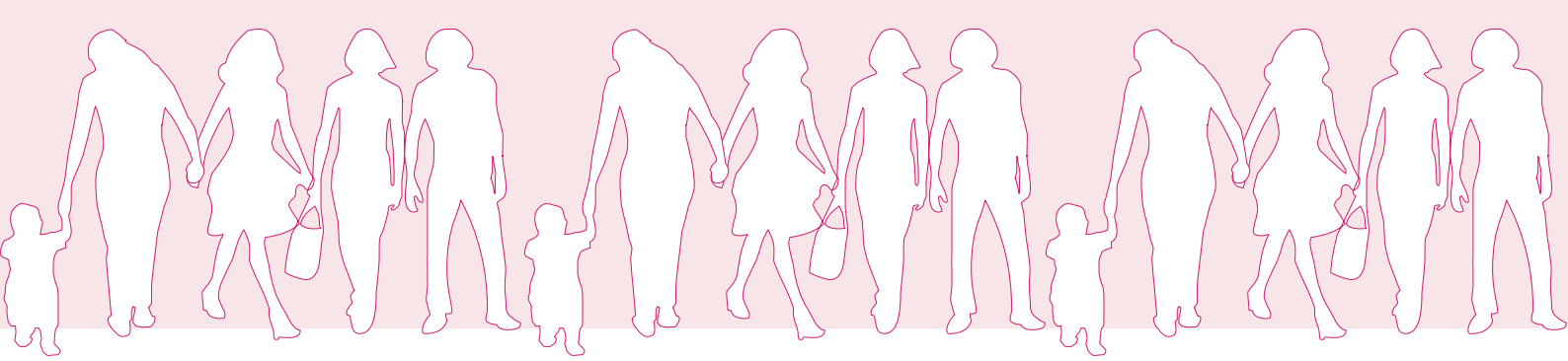
2 See Host structures in 2007 in Point 2.3.



3.3. Host structures of the European Consumer Centres in 2007

Country	Host structure	type of structure ³
Austria	Verein für Konsumenteninformation (VKI)	NGO
Belgium	Organisation Indépendante pour la Protection du Consommateur a.s.b.l (OIPC, Test-Achats)	NGO
Bulgaria	Commission for Consumer Protection (CCP)	G
Cyprus	Competition and Consumer Protection Service, Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Tourism	G
Czech Republic	Ministry of Industry and Trade	G
Denmark	Forbrugerstyrelsen (the National Consumer Agency of Denmark)	G
Estonia	Consumer Protection Board of Estonia	G
Finland	Kuluttajavirasto (Finnish Consumer Agency & Ombudsman)	G
France	Euro-Info-Consommateurs / Euro-Info-Verbraucher e.V.	NGO
Germany	Euro-Info-Consommateurs / Euro-Info-Verbraucher e.V.	NGO
Greece	Hellenic Ministry of Development, Consumer General Secretariat	G
Hungary	Országos Fogyasztóvédelmi Egyesület (National Association for Consumer Protection in Hungary)	NGO
Iceland	Neytendasamtökin (The Consumers Association of Iceland)	NGO
Ireland	European Consumer Centre Dublin Ltd.	I
Italy	ADICONSUM – Associazione Difesa Consumatori e Ambiente	NGO
Latvia	Latvian Consumer Rights Protection Centre	G
Lithuania	National Consumer Rights Protection Board at the Ministry of Justice	G
Luxembourg	European Consumer Centre-Groupement d'Intérêt Economique (GIE)	I
Malta	Consumer and Competition Division (CCD) within the Ministry for Competitiveness and Communication.	G
The Netherlands	Stichting Het Juridisch Loket (English: Foundation the Legal Service Counter)	G
Norway	The Consumer Council of Norway	G
Poland	Office of Competition and Consumer Protection	G
Portugal	Consumer Directorate-General / Direção-Geral do Consumidor	G
Romania	The Association for Consumer Protection (ACP)	NGO
Slovakia	Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic	G
Slovenia	Zveza Potrošnikov Slovenije (Slovene Consumers' Association)	NGO
Spain	NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CONSUMPTION (NIC)	G
Sweden	Konsumentverket, KOV (Swedish Consumer Agency, CA)	G
United Kingdom	The Trading Standards Institute (TSI)	NGO

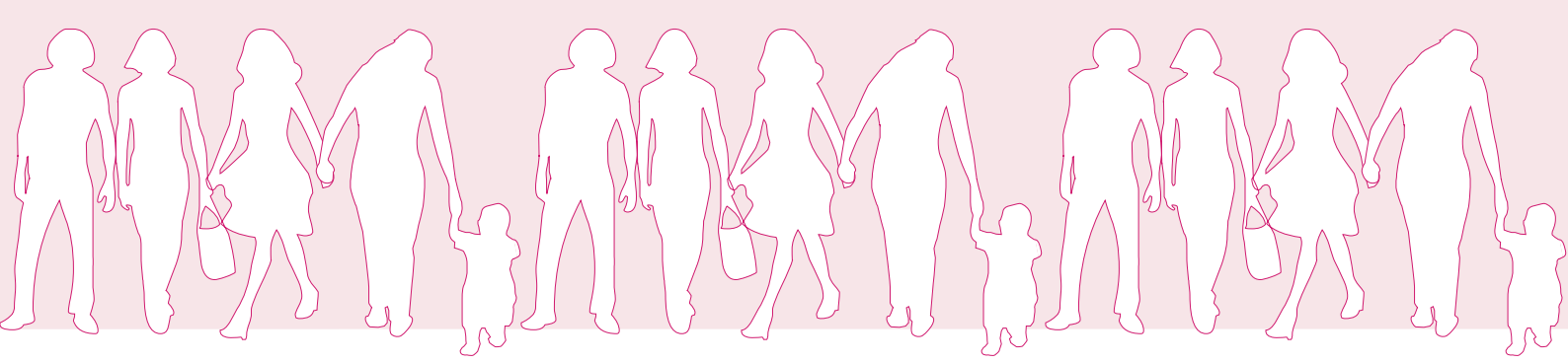
3 NGO: Non Governmental Organisation / G : Governmental / I: Independent – no host structure



ECC-Net team within DG SANCO



From left to right: Gerda Duran, Leonie Feldman, Jolanta Brozyna, J. Pinto Antunes, Zsuzsanna Csirmaz, Tamas Molnar, Marianne Kinzelmann, J. Orus Baguena



4. MAIN NETWORK EVENTS, DEVELOPMENTS

4.1. Joint projects

For statistical and policy-making purposes, the ECC-Net collects and analyses information based on the cases the Centres receive directly from consumers. Each year some Centres, the 'leaders' of the project, coordinate and draft a joint project report, while the other ECCs participate by sending the information on their respective cases to the leaders.

In 2007 the following joint projects were undertaken:

Air passenger rights: Consumer Complaints 2006

The launch of the joint air passenger rights report was held on 6 December in Brussels. The purpose of the report, co-authored by ECC Belgium, Ireland and Sweden, was to present an overview of the complaints related to air travel received by the ECC-Net in 2006, to identify the main problems encountered and to suggest recommendations. At the launch representatives from airlines, national enforcement bodies and the press were also present⁴.



Launching of the joint "Air passenger rights report" held at the Commission Representation in Brussels

'Howard', the Shopping Assistant

Howard the Shopping Assistant, was launched on 19 November in the European Parliament offices in Dublin with the participation of MEP Mairéad McGuinness. Howard the Shopping Assistant has been developed to help consumers buy on-line: it gives consumers some general advice on shopping on-line and it also contains a more interactive part with information about the website the consumer is considering shopping in. The leader of the joint project was ECC Denmark, who developed the tool and introduced it in Denmark in the beginning of the year. Howard is now available on the websites of ECC Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the UK, and will soon be at consumers' disposal on more ECCs' webpages⁵.

Tourism

15 Centres of the Network including Spain, Germany, Cyprus and France as coordinators, produced leaflets on healthcare, postal services, travel, shopping and accommodation to provide the tourists with necessary information when travelling abroad.

CONCRETE "SUCCESS STORIES"

Slovenian consumer - Italian trader – reimbursement of tickets

In May 2007 the consumer bought two tickets from the trader for Jammin Festival in San Giuliano park near Venice. The festival was supposed to be held from 14 to 17 June 2007. He bought tickets with the value of € 215. During the festival on 15 June there was a big storm, which caused the collapse of the whole sound construction, which hurt 25 people. The organizers were forced to finish the festival. At the festival consumers were told they would get their reimbursement for their tickets. On 16 June the consumer returning from the festival stopped in Trieste at the trader's premises in order to get reimbursement. At the trader's premises he was told not to be reimbursed his tickets as it was too early and the trader hasn't received the official notice from the organiser. The consumer insisted, stating that the information about the end of the festival was official and was posted on the organizer's website too. On 28 June the consumer went back to the trader's premises to get his tickets reimbursed. However, he was told that he was too late as the deadline for the reimbursement was one day earlier on 27 June. After the intervention of ECC Slovenia and ECC Italy the consumer got the reimbursement.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress_cons/index_en.htm

⁵ For details please see the respective ECC's website.

CONCRETE “SUCCESS STORIES”

German consumer- French trader – financial service

A German consumer owned a bank account in France. As she tried to transfer money from her French to her German account, she has been charged with €60 bank charges even though the sum transferred has been below €50.000. She therefore contacted ECC Germany which transferred the case to ECC France, who contacted the bank explaining to them the EU law on this subject (same bank charges for European and national transfers below €50.000) and asking for the reimbursement of €54 (the price for a domestic transfer being approx. €3 each). First the bank didn't answer, then they explained that the consumer has asked for a BEN transfer and therefore the EU rules don't apply. The Centre contacted the bank again, pointing out that the modus chosen by the consumer BEN doesn't change anything on the EU dispositions. Furthermore the consumer didn't choose anything expressly therefore the modus SHARE has to be applied. As the customer service didn't respond to this request, the French Centre transferred the case to an Alternative Dispute Resolution body. The decision was in favour of the consumer, however when reimbursing the consumer the bank again took €6 bank charges. ECC France had to contact the bank again to finally get the entire sum reimbursed.

Within this project a “**Conference on tourism and consumer protection in the Mediterranean**” took place on 30-31 October, in Torremolinos. The European Consumer Centre in Spain, together with the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, the Secretaría General de Turismo (Spanish General Secretariat for Tourism) organised this conference with the help of ECC France/Germany, Portugal, Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Cyprus and Malta. The aim was to have the tourism and consumer affairs officials of the countries bordering the Mediterranean meet and think about how they can improve tourism offerings of quality and safety in the region for European consumers⁶.

4.2. Alternative Dispute Resolution workshops and seminars

ECCs advise on out-of-court-settlement (Alternative Dispute resolution- ADR) procedures for consumers who have a dispute but who have been unable to reach an agreement directly with the trader. ADR schemes usually use a third party such as an arbitrator, mediator or an ombudsman to help the consumer and the trader to reach a solution.

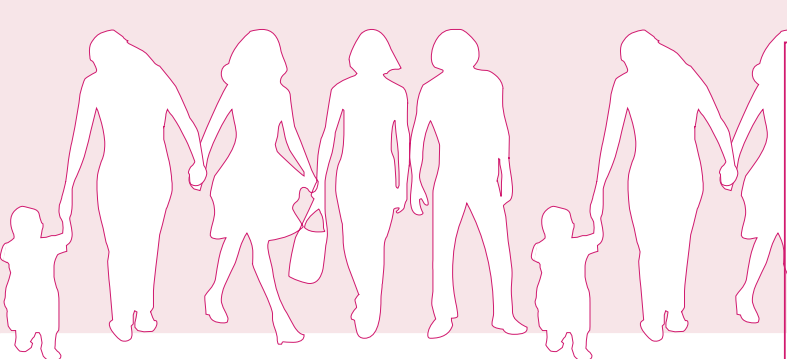
In order to improve the awareness of the out-of-court resolution schemes among consumers and business, ECC-Net organises numerous seminars and workshops at national level. At EU level they organise conferences to share their problems and best practices.

In 2007, besides several seminars held at national level, the following main EU wide ADR related events were organised by the ECCs:

Baltic Sea conference on ADR, 15 October, Warsaw

This year ECC Poland hosted the 3rd ADR Seminar of Baltic Countries which was held in Warsaw on the 15 October. The seminar brought together the representatives of ECCs from the following countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. The event was devoted to the issue of ADR schemes, namely accessibility for European consumers. The conference was also a good opportunity to discuss the role of the ECCs in promoting ADR policies in different countries.

⁶ http://cec.consumo-inc.es/cec/secciones/Actividades/Actividades_en.asp



CONCRETE “SUCCESS STORIES”

Greek consumer – UK trader – e-commerce

A Greek consumer ordered some clothing from the online shop of a well known British football team in the United Kingdom. At that period of time, the company was offering (it was advertised in its website) free shipping costs for each purchase made by consumers throughout Europe. However, the consumer’s credit card was charged with the shipping costs. After a while, the consumer made a second purchase from the same company. This time, two of the ordered items were not delivered even though the consumer’s credit card was charged for them. He tried to contact the company, but in vain. The consumer decided to contact ECC Greece in order to lodge his complaint and to ask for a refund for the shipping costs charged in his credit card after the first order as well as for the money paid for the two non delivered products (plus the shipping costs for each). After the successful collaboration of ECC Greece and UK, the company refunded the consumer.

Conference on “Alternative Dispute Resolution - More opportunities for consumers”, 21 September, Lithuania

The conference was launched by Mr. Feliksas Petrauskas, General Director of the State Consumer Rights Protection Authority. 68 participants including colleagues from different ECCs attended the event. Presentations were held on the Norwegian ADR model, on the opportunities of ADR in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and on the settlement of air passenger complaints⁷.

Seminar “Alternative Dispute Resolution systems in Spain and in the European Union”, 10 and 11 of December 2007, Madrid

This seminar was the follow-up of the seminar held in Madrid in 2006 on the same topic. Lively debates with exchange of best practices followed the presentations on the Spanish and European ADR systems. The seminar organised by ECC Spain presented different dispute scenarios with controversies that can be resolved by ADR systems and also dealt with the opportunities offered by technological developments, which open the doors to the introduction of new procedures (video conferences, cell phones, etc) as well as the need to establish cooperation policies between the public and the private sector in order to maintain a balance, and to achieve an acceptable quantity of extra-judicial dispute resolution systems, in accordance with the different needs of business and consumers⁸.

4.3. Other main events

World Consumer Day on 15 March

The European Commissioner for Consumers, Meglena Kuneva marked World Consumer Day in Berlin, with an appeal for a free and informed debate on consumer rights in the digital world. The Commissioner attended the German Presidency conference on “Challenges and opportunities in a digitalised world”. Commissioner Kuneva spoke at the European Consumer Day conference, held in Berlin, jointly organised under the German Presidency by the European Economic and Social Committee and the “Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband”. The topic was “Financial services in the European Union”.

To mark World Consumer Day, the ECC-Net organised a series of initiatives across Europe, from the “Month of fraud prevention” (ECC Austria) and an on-line quiz (ECC Belgium) to presentations in schools (ECC Cyprus), lectures (ECC Czech Republic), seminars on the ethics of marketing of medicines to consumers (ECC

7 <http://www.ecc.lt/index.php?1911009705>

8 http://cec.consumo-inc.es/cec/secciones/Actividades/Actividades_en.asp

CONCRETE "SUCCESS STORIES"

Swedish consumer - Danish trader - holiday

A Swedish family rented a holiday house in Denmark for one week. A few days after returning to Sweden, the consumers received a letter from the trader saying that a table in the holiday house had been partly damaged during the consumers' visit to the house. The trader claimed that the consumers had put something hot on the table that had left a mark on the table and therefore the consumer could not get back the deposit of DKK 1,000 and was furthermore demanded to pay an additional DKK 144.75 to cover the price of the repair. The consumers claimed that they left the house without having damaged anything. They refused to pay for a damage they did not cause and demanded the trader to prove that they caused it. ECC Denmark received the case from ECC Sweden and contacted the trader asking what proof there was, that the consumer had caused the damage. Following this intervention the trader accepted to withdraw from the claim and returned the deposit to the consumers.

Finland), joint events at the European Parliament (ECC France and ECC Germany) as well as stands in metro stations (ECC Greece). Conferences, on-line campaigns, visits to schools, seminars on scams and distribution of leaflets and other material were also organised in Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain.

Adoption of the proposal for a new Timeshare Directive

On 7 June 2007 the European Commission adopted a proposal for a new Directive on Timeshare which will enhance consumer protection by extending the scope of the current rules to also include the

new products which have emerged in the market, such as holiday clubs. Resale and exchange will also be covered. On this occasion press events were organised in six of the Member States in the Commission representations in Stockholm, London, Madrid, Rome, Paris and Berlin. Representatives from the national ECCs assisted in this event by providing information for the national press and being available for interviews, as well as by providing case studies and contact details for complainants who are willing to be interviewed and participating in press briefings.

Opening of the European Village and Conference on Cross-border Consumer Protection, 14-15 June, Berlin

On 14 June Meglena Kuneva, Commissioner for Consumers officially opened the European Village with the Minister of Food and Rural Areas of Baden-Württemberg. This day was all about communicating with consumers, establishing direct contact with citizens and stakeholders. On 15 June a conference "Cross-border consumer protection – Perspectives of the cooperation between the network for national enforcement bodies and the European Consumer Centres' Network" brought together stakeholders to discuss possibilities and perspectives for cooperation between the two networks. This Berlin event was organised by the ECC Germany together with the Ministry of Food and Rural Areas of Baden-Württemberg⁹.

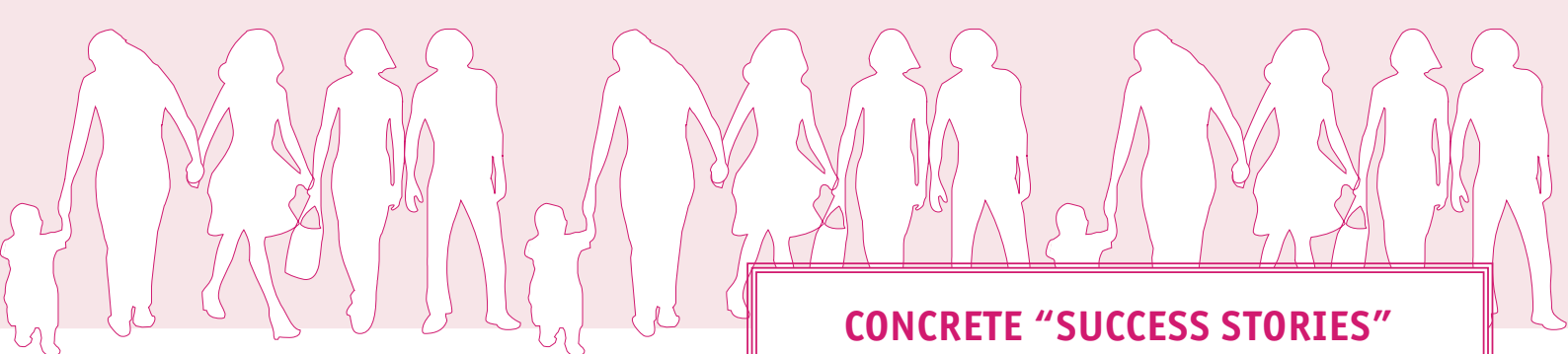
'You choose!' campaign

An information campaign called 'You choose!' on the opening of energy markets in the European Union was launched during the summer. Whereas several Member States had already opened their markets some time ago, 14 more opened their electricity and/or gas markets to households on 1 July 2007, thus allowing millions of consumers to choose their electricity and/or gas suppliers. Members



From left to right: Mr Peter Hauk, Minister of Food & Rural areas, Baden -Württemberg, Commissioner Meglena Kuneva, Mr Gerhard Sabathil, Head of Commission Representation in Berlin and Ms. Julia Klöckner, MP, Spokeswoman for consumer issues in Bundestag

9 http://www.euroinfo-kehl.eu/GB/fra1_gb.htm



CONCRETE “SUCCESS STORIES”

Luxemburgish consumer – French trader – internet service

A Luxemburgish consumer who studied in France took an ADSL connection through a French operator. From the beginning the connection never functioned and the consumer phoned several times to the trader’s helpdesk to ask for reparation. After several months, the ADSL connection could not be used and the consumer decided to suspend the payment for non-provision of the service. The operator still didn’t do the repair and sent reminders to the consumer threatening him to go to justice. The consumer decided to rescind the contract and sent a letter to the operator who claimed that he never received such a letter and continued to request the payment of the connection including legal interest. After the intervention of the ECC-Net, the operator accepted the extraordinary rescind of the contract without any fees and also proposed a period of 6 months without charging the consumer in the case he decided to stay with the operator.

of the ECC-Net participated in the campaign in order to highlight to consumers the opportunity to choose their electricity and/or gas suppliers and to inform them about their rights in an open energy market.

Eurotariff: the new roaming regulation

The ECC-Net took part in the promotion of the new roaming regulation during summer 2007. The Centres disseminated postcards and leaflets and informed consumers via their websites on the new Eurotariff, which means much cheaper calls to European travellers when they use their mobile phone abroad.

ECC-Net Cooperation Day

In 2007 the members of the ECC-Net organised the Cooperation Day on 8-9 November in Lisbon parallel to the Portuguese EU Presidency event. All ECCs participated in this event hosted by ECC Portugal, which gave the opportunity to the Network to discuss upcoming joint projects and best practices of cooperation. The Cooperation day was also attended by more than thirty case handlers, giving the opportunity for the exchange of experiences on case-handling.

Within the scope of the Portuguese Presidency event a “**Conference on Collective Redress**” also took place, with the participation of ECCs.



ECC Directors and Case handlers at the 2007 Cooperation Day in Lisbon



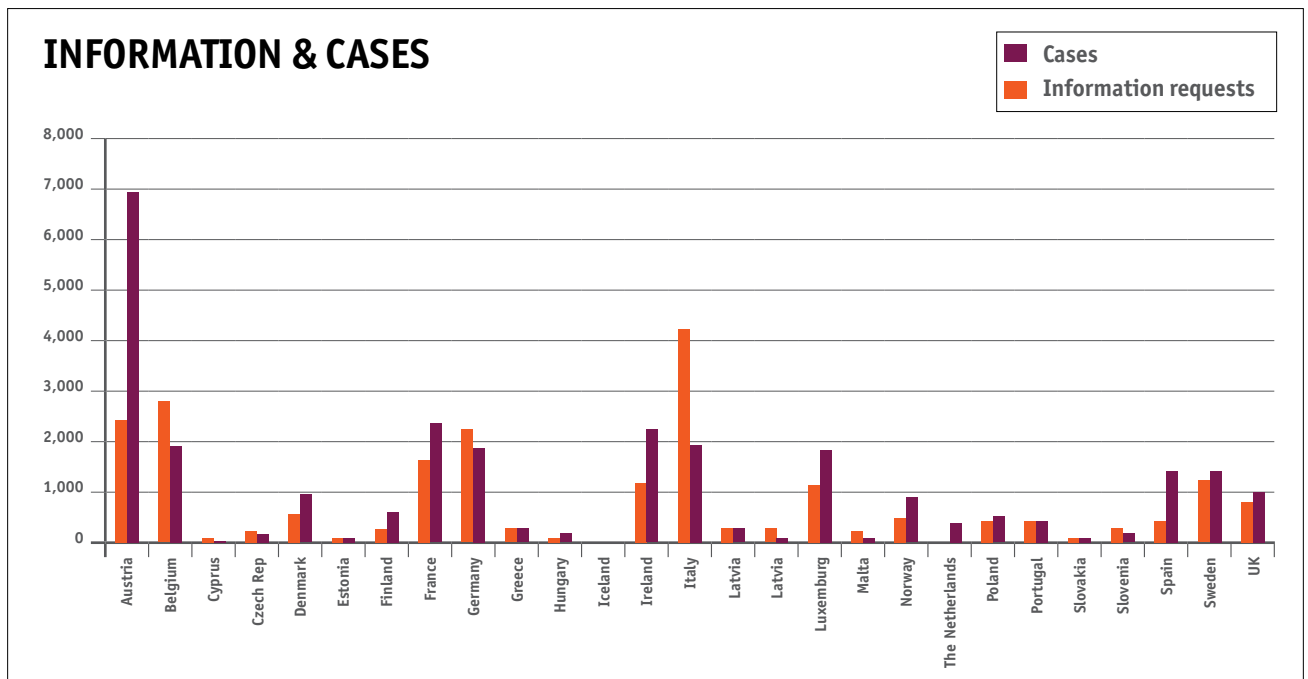
OVERVIEW OF CASES

Case-handling

For the first time in the life of the ECC-Net, the statistics have been collated from the ECC-Net IT tool, which became fully operational in 2007 thus allowing for the extraction of data.

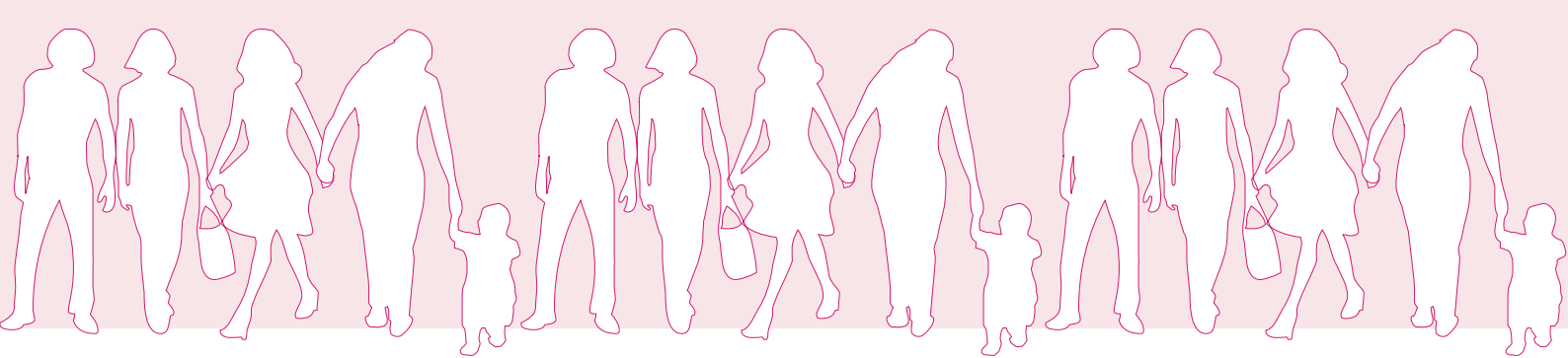
The data from the IT tool suggests that 2007 was a year of consolidation in the activities of the network. In general, the ECC-Net dealt with a growing number of complaints and information requests, having been contacted by more than 55 000 consumers in 2007. This represented a 10% increase from last years figures, when the ECC-Net was contacted 50 000 times.

The picture emerging from the statistics shows that there is still a marked difference in terms of case handling among the different countries, with a small group of countries handling a large share of the network cases. While this obviously reflects the differences per country of its percentage of citizens that shop cross-border, it is also due to the fact that some of the centres only started operating in 2007.



It is clear from the statistics that about one third of the ECC centres handle more than two thirds of all the cases and information requests in the Network. The situation is even more differentiated in the sense that while most of the centres do not reach a threshold of 1000 handled cases and/or information requests, a couple of centres hover above the 4000 threshold¹⁰.

¹⁰ It should be pointed out that due to some differences in the way some ECCs encode their cases, some inaccuracies may be reflected in the figures regarding information requests.

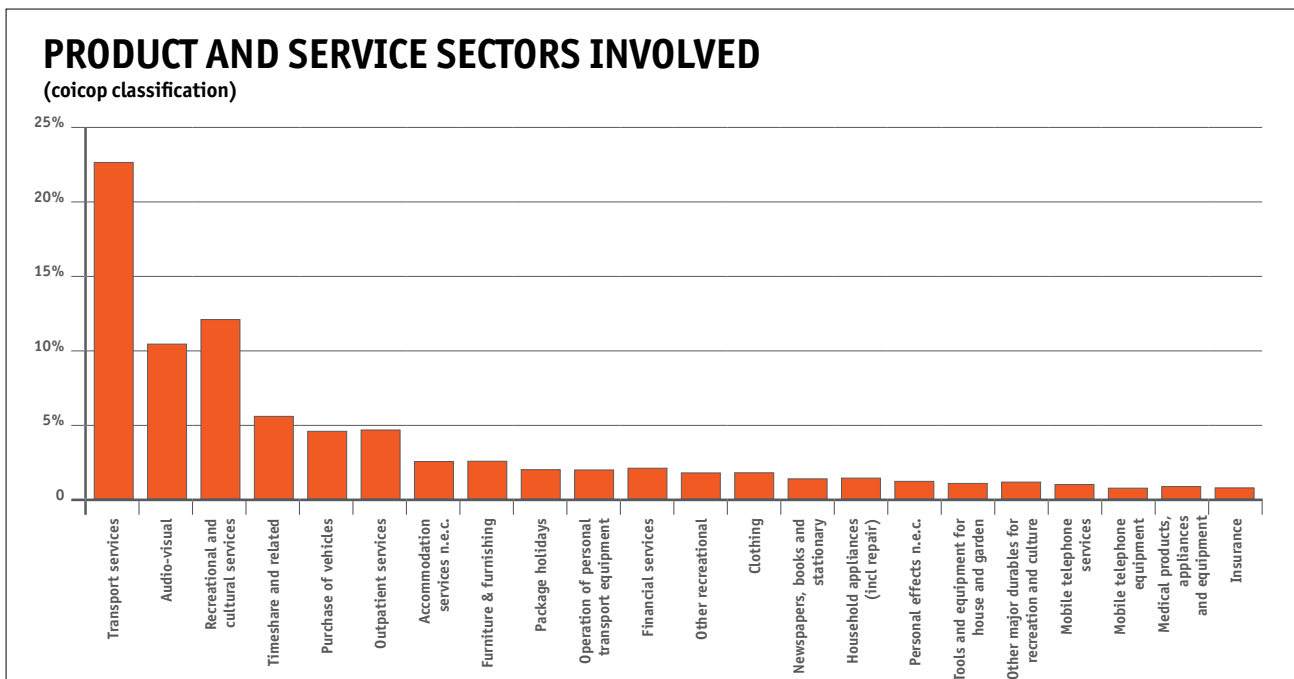


It is also interesting to note that while in the majority of the ECCs the number of handled cases is superior to the number of information requests, in a handful of them it seems that the number of information requests takes up most of their work.

The following charts show in more detail the nature of the cases dealt with by the ECCs in 2007.

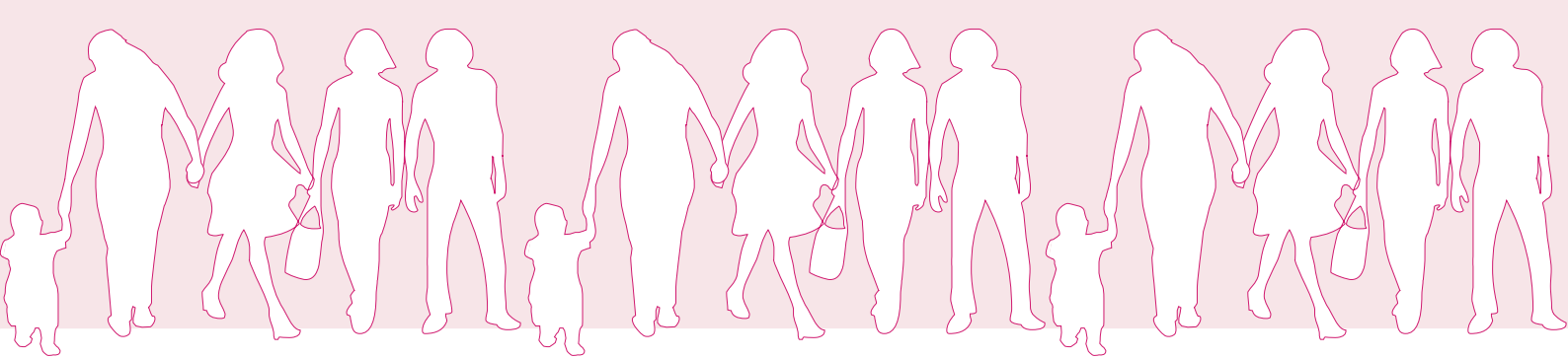
Complaints by sector

In 2007 consumers complained mostly about transport services, recreational and culture services and by audio-visual. In terms of the service and product sectors involved (and also products), we see that 22% of the complaints recorded by the European Consumer Centres focus on transport services, followed by recreational and culture services (almost 12% of consumers' complaints) and then by audio-visual (almost 10%). These three categories constitute almost half of the complaints received by the ECCs¹¹.



A further breakdown of the complaints reveals that in the transport service area, which constituted the bulk of the consumer complaints, the main problem areas were related to air travel (both air passenger travel and luggage transport by air) followed by car rental. More than half of the consumers' complaints in this category are about cancellation or flight delays, lost luggage, etc.

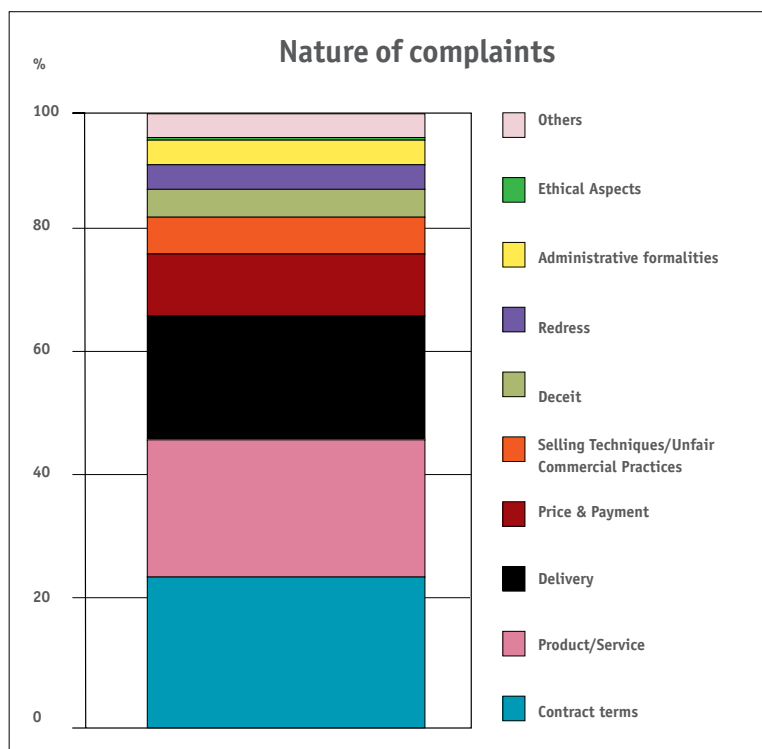
¹¹ According to the United Nations methodology on "Classification of individual consumption according to purpose"



As regards the recreational and cultural sector, consumers mostly complained about games of chance, which came third in terms of total number of complaints classified according to product and service sectors involved. Consumers here complained about internet scams, lotteries, etc.

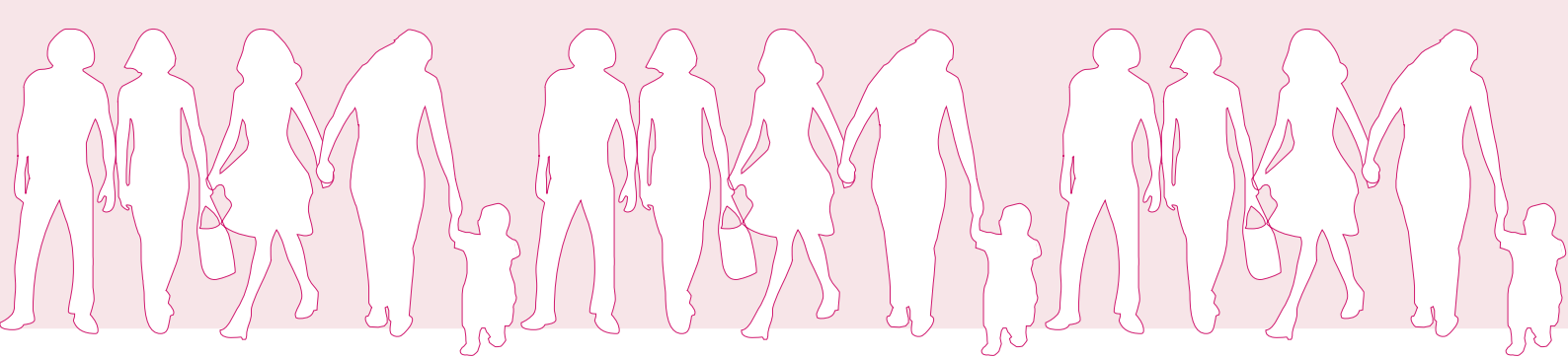
Finally, the fourth biggest motive for consumers' complaints was problems with "equipment for the reception, recording and reproduction of sound and pictures", which contributed to the recreational and culture services coming in third place as regards classification of complaints by sector.

Nature of complaints



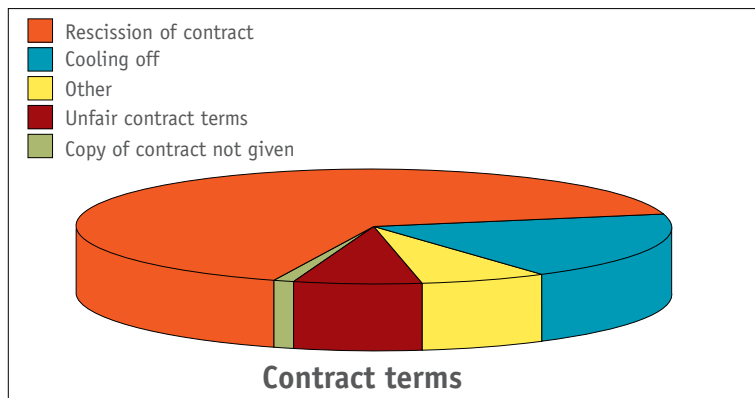
Looking at the number of complaints in terms of the nature of complaint, from the complaints received by the ECCs, the figures indicate that the kind of problems consumers encountered most relate to only three problem areas: contract terms, product/service and delivery. These three areas gave rise to the main problems on cross-border trade as reflected by the data of the ECC IT tool.

From the total number of complaints, those related to "Contract terms" constitute nearly 25% of the nature of complaints, followed by the category "product/service", which takes up 22.4 % of the complaints received by ECCs, followed closely by complaints regarding "Delivery", which takes up 20% of the total number of complaints received by the ECCs.

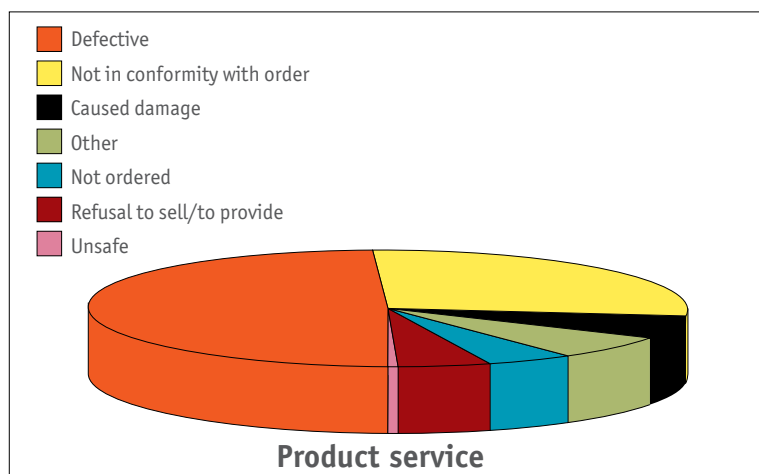


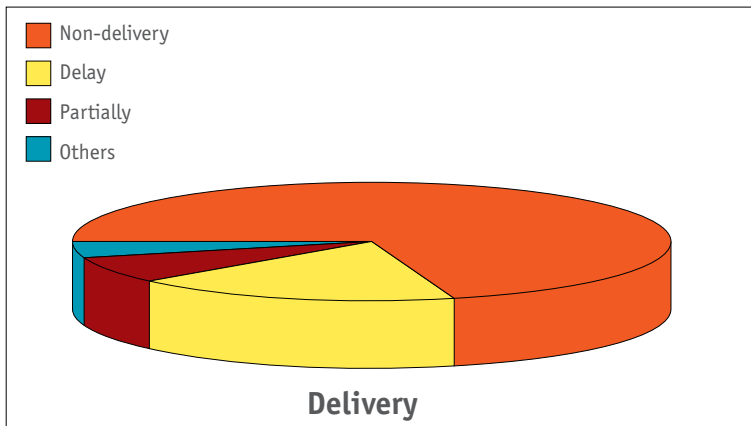
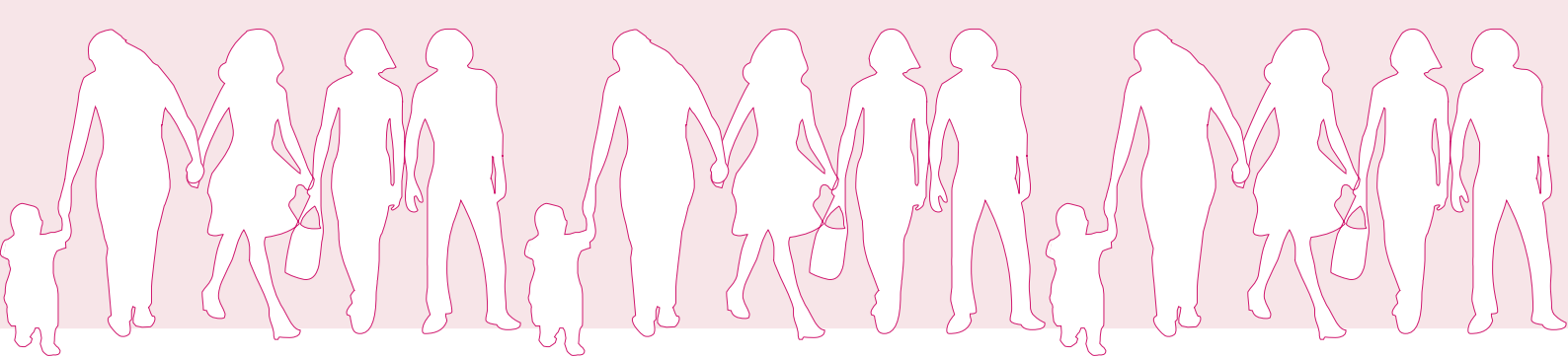
In the following charts, we therefore look more in detail at these particular categories.

Starting with the category “Contract terms”, which represents the bulk of the complaints received by ECCs, the data suggests that almost 70% of the complaints are about “rescission of contracts”. This represents by far the biggest cause of complaints, followed distantly by “cooling off” with 19% of the complaints and then equally by “unfair contract terms” and “other” with 7%. Finally, about 1% of the complaints regarding contract terms relate to a copy of the contract not being supplied.



As regards complaints on “Product/service”, nearly half (49%) of the complaints in this area are about defective products or services. This is followed by consumers complaining about “non-conformity” of a product or service, (27%). Finally, consumers have also complained about receiving products and/or services that were “damaged” (6% of complaints in this category), closely followed by consumers claiming not to have “ordered” a product on service (5% of the consumers’ complaints), and then complaints by consumers that were “refused a sale and/or provision of a product or service” (also with 5% of complaints).

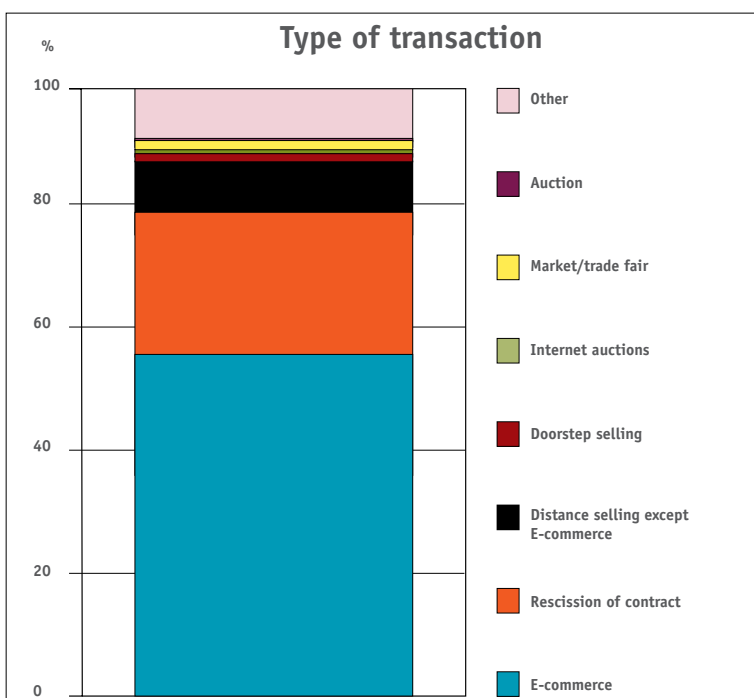


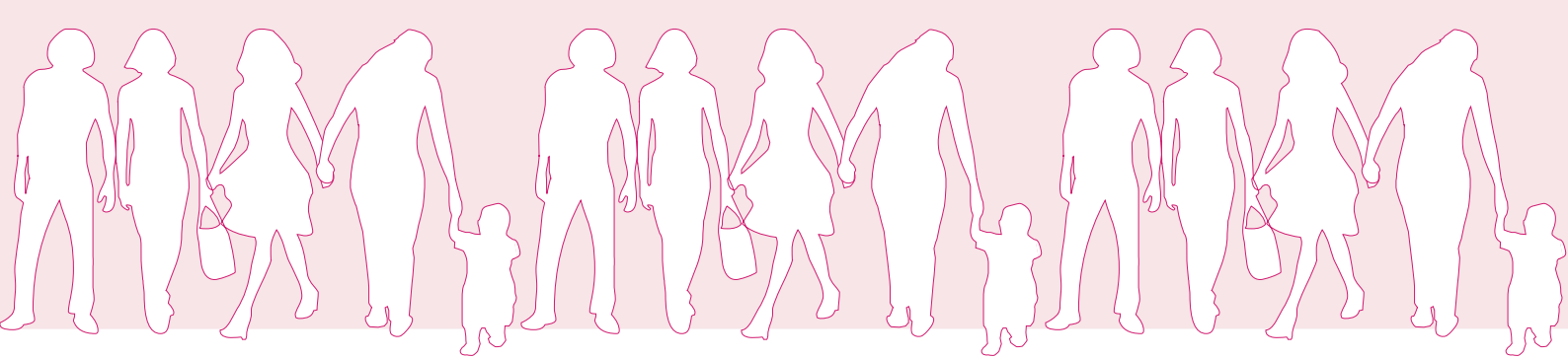


As regards “Delivery”, which was the third main area where consumers had reasons to complain, the statistics for 2007 show that a large number of the complaints (about 71% of the consumers’ complaints in this category) were about non-delivery of the product or service. This is followed by complaints of consumers that have experienced “delays” in getting a good or service (18% of complaints in this category). To a lesser extent, we also find consumers’ complaining about “partial delivery” of a product or service (7% of cases).

Complaints by type of transaction

Analysing the complaints per type of transaction, it is interesting to note that slightly more than half of complaints originate from e-commerce transactions, followed at some distance by problems arising from transactions “on the premises”.





The bulk of the complaints received and handled by the ECCs, considering the selling method involved, is to a great extent related to “e-commerce” which takes up almost 55% of all the complaints. Second come the complaints arising from transactions “on the premises” of the seller, in 24.7% of the cases. And third come the complaints arising from transactions concluded through “distance selling”, which represented 9% of the complaints.

6 ACTIVITIES OF THE EUROPEAN CONSUMER CENTRES

AUSTRIA

During 2007 ECC Austria focused its activities on several issues: promotional activities (information on mobile phoning abroad, on internet services, etc); media work including weekly and up to date news on ECC Austria's website www.europakonsument.at; advice and assistance to consumers through the new IT Tool; showing visibility and acting as speaker at several events, conferences, etc.; ADR-promotion and intensification of cooperation with other European networks (CPC-Net, SOLVIT, Europe Direct, Euro Info Centres, etc.).

In 2007 ECC Austria had the possibility to visit ECC Hungary for a study visit. Staff of ECC Latvia visited ECC Austria for a study visit. ECC Luxemburg sent a colleague for a 3 days job-exchange to ECC Austria.

Several discussions with the Austrian Ministry for Consumer Protection took place as well as an evaluation of the contact details of the notified ADRs in Austria.

In 2007 an incredible increase in telephone complaints via the "Europa-Hotline" took place, especially concerning several online service companies. ECC Austria gave 12 TV interviews, 11 radio interviews and 27 interviews to newspapers and magazines. Additionally ECC Austria provided written information to the Austrian media. One press-conference was organised in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry for Social Affairs and Consumer Protection on the occasion of the "Fraud Prevention Month" campaign. ECC Austria's website, www.europakonsument.at, is one of the main channels for ECC Austria's general information on cross-border purchasing. Therefore it has been updated almost weekly.

Furthermore, ECC Austria used the possibility to publish articles on cross-border consumer issues regularly in Austria's only independent consumer-magazine "Konsument" during the year. Within our printed information material we published a brochure concerning "Mobile phoning abroad with – amongst other things – information about the new EU Roaming Regulations. For the European School Diary 08/09 ECC Austria was involved in providing cross-border consumer information for young pupils. Moreover 81 school lectures (either in ECC Austria premises or in schools) took place in 2007.

Furthermore, the good existing relationships with the Austrian Airlines Company and the Austrian NEB on Air Passenger Rights have been improved for the benefit of Austrian and European consumers. When it is time for networking, ECC Austria participated in several "joint projects": Tourism Project 2007 and Air Passenger Rights Report 2006

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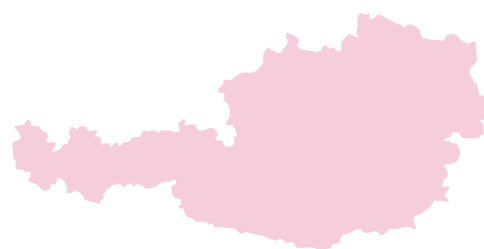
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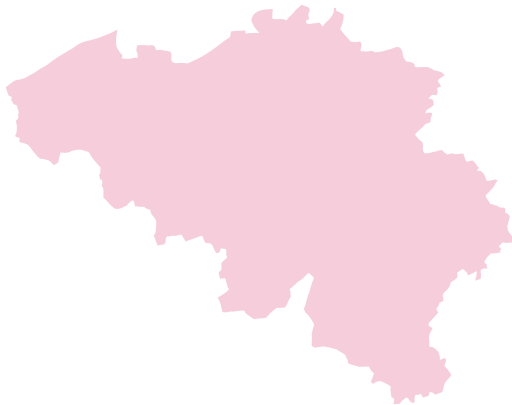
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ECC Belgium's two main targets in 2007 were to provide high-quality assistance to the cross-border consumer and to help consumers to be better informed about their rights in Europe. They enhanced their website with at least three new articles per month on specific consumer topics. They attracted good media attention with two major projects:

- a joint prevention campaign on purchasing on the Internet aimed at young people, carried out in cooperation with the Belgian authority DG Control and Mediation (1st half year)
- an international press conference to present the ECC-Net joint report "Air Passenger Rights: Consumer Complaints 2006" (Brussels, December)

The prevention campaign consisted of a website quiz on the consumer's rights when purchasing on the Internet developed in the framework of the Fraud Prevention Month, and a leaflet targeted at young people aged 15 to 18 which was distributed to all schools in Belgium. A press conference, jointly organised by DG Control and Mediation and ECC Belgium, took place as well. The air passenger rights report is a publication in which the majority of the ECCs participated. It examines the complaints of air passengers and how to resolve them and gives 34 recommendations.

The number of consumers who addressed ECC Belgium with information requests and requests for assistance with cross-border complaints was higher than expected.

Apart from co-authoring the Network's joint project on air passengers' complaints - in cooperation with ECCs Ireland and Sweden - the centre also participated in a working group to prepare a joint project on price comparisons. As a centre based in the capital of Europe, they welcomed visiting delegations from Slovenia, Bulgaria and Korea to which they explained the functioning of ECC-Net and how assistance is provided to consumers concretely.

ECC Cyprus carried out several activities during 2007 in order to inform consumers of the existence of the Centre as well as of its main scopes/aims.

During the year several articles were published in newspapers and magazines, regarding the Alternative Dispute Resolution scheme, e-commerce, Air Passenger Rights and consumer protection when buying from abroad. Furthermore, two leaflets were published and disseminated to consumers and relevant stakeholders, titled "Air Passenger Rights" and "Are you a European consumer? We care about you". The leaflets contain useful information for consumers regarding their rights when travelling by air, as well as general information about the ECC-Net. The Annual Report of ECC Cyprus was published and disseminated to several stakeholders, regarding the Centre's activities and assistance provided to consumers during 2006.

The Director of ECC Cyprus and other members of the Centre took part in several meetings of the Network such as:

- Study visit to ECC Ireland that took place on 10 and 11 May.
- Presidency event organised by ECC Germany and the Ministry of Food and Rural Areas Baden, that took place on 14 and 15 June in Germany.
- Conference on aspects of European consumer law, organised by ECC Luxembourg on 10 October.
- Conference on leisure tourism and consumer protection in the Mediterranean, organised by ECC Spain on 30 and 31 October.
- Cooperation day and IT Tool training session in Lisbon that took place on 8 November.
- Presidency event in Lisbon on 9 and 10 November.

ECC Cyprus took part in two joint projects:

- Joint Project on Tourism
- Air Passenger Rights Report: Complaints for 2006.

Furthermore, ECC Cyprus took part in several surveys and questionnaires, such as the "Questionnaire on consumer Scoreboard", "Questions on tourism services", "Questionnaire review of consumer acquis" etc.

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Hosted by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Czech ECC focused in 2007 on the promotion of their activities and results. They undertook a wide range of activities using the different media available. Altogether they published 16 articles and interviews in national, regional and internet newspapers including two specials in the two national dailies "Pravo" (on travelling, air passenger rights and timeshare) and "Hospodarske noviny" (on buying abroad and on how to claim goods bought in the EU). Two ECC-Net reportages were prepared for the national TV programme "Eurofondue". ECC material, including the Network's joint project report "*Air Passenger Rights: Consumer Complaints 2006*", was published on the Ministry's consumer protection web pages. The ECC's publications were widely disseminated through the Czech consumer protection organisations (CPOs), Trade Licence Offices, Regional tourist information centres, schools and universities. A promotional CD on the ECC's main activities was also created.

The ECC cooperated closely with the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MIT) regarding the creation of a future ADR system in the Czech Republic. As a member of the working group of stakeholders (Ministries, CPOs, Chamber of Commerce, Court of Arbitration, Association of Mediators, Association of SME), they evaluated material and experiences from other Member States countries using the assistance of the ECC-Net. They also organised an international seminar regarding the ADR project and promoted the ADR system through lectures, the website and a brochure which is scheduled to be finalised in 2008.

In cooperation with the EC representation in Prague, a common advertisement of six EU networks in the CR (SOLVIT, ECC, FINNET, Euroinfocentre, Europe Direct and Association of the Citizen Advice) was published on 9 May in the flyer "Together" which appeared as an enclosure of the daily DNES. The ECC also participated in the promotional event of SOLVIT (and Europe Direct) on the occasion of their 5th anniversary: at a public stand in the centre of Prague, information, publications and promotional material was made available. Other events where the ECC was represented was a joint meeting of 23 EU Networks in the Czech Republic organised by the EC representation and a meeting of the Consumer Advisory Committee together with MIT and CPOs. The ECC also gave a series of lectures including to the representatives of the regional branches of Europe Direct, for Eurocentre Prague and for different regional bodies and offices.

Within the Network, they participated in the joint projects on "tourism" and the report "*Air Passenger Rights: Consumer Complaints 2006*". They also attended the central Network meetings organised by the Commission and the Network's Cooperation Day in Lisbon.

DENMARK

In the beginning of 2007 ECC Denmark launched a new interactive shopping assistant called Howard. Howard is a small web-based tool created to make it easier for consumers to shop online without getting cheated. Howard helps consumers avoid fraudulent web traders, it helps them finding the serious web traders, it gives good advice on shopping online and it helps consumers know their rights when shopping online in Europe. By the end of 2007 Howard was available in 7 European languages and more are still coming. Howard can be found on www.forbrugereuropa.dk/howard.

ECC Denmark also launched a SMS-service to help air passengers in the beginning of 2007. The service is based on the European Regulation on air passengers' rights and applies all over Europe. With this new service consumers can get information about their air passenger rights on the move no matter if they are in Copenhagen, Cologne, Rome or Budapest. The only thing a consumer has to do is to send the text "fly" (without quotation marks) to +45 20 90 29 20 to get the service in English. The service is free of charge and available in Danish and English. The SMS service is a joint venture between ECC Denmark, the Danish Consumer Agency and the Danish Civil Aviation Administration.

A lot of information regarding cross-border shopping is available on ECC Denmark's website, and much more information was added in 2007. To make consumers aware of this and of our services ECC Denmark gave more than 50 interviews to national TV stations, radio stations and newspapers in 2007, gave speeches and made presentations at a number of different events and advertised on the internet and on TV. Probably partly as a result of this the number of visits to the website has skyrocketed from 44 000 in 2006 to more than a 100 000 in 2007.

One of ECC Denmark's main tasks is to give consumers good advice and assist them with cross-border complaints. Consumers can contact ECC Denmark via a phone call, e-mail, in writing or come to the office to get advice. In 2007 ECC Denmark extended its opening hours for phone calls so that consumers now can contact the ECC Denmark all day. The number of contacts with consumers ECC Denmark dealt with increased again in 2007 to up to more than 1 500 contacts.

During 2007 ECC Denmark again participated actively in the network. Among other things ECC Denmark organised a Nordic meeting in Copenhagen to strengthen the cooperation between the Nordic ECCs, participated in most of the events organised by our ECC colleagues and we also paid study visits to ECC Ireland and ECC Belgium. Finally ECC Denmark participated in all the joint projects in the network, being the lead in one of the projects, the implementation of the shopping assistant in a number of countries.

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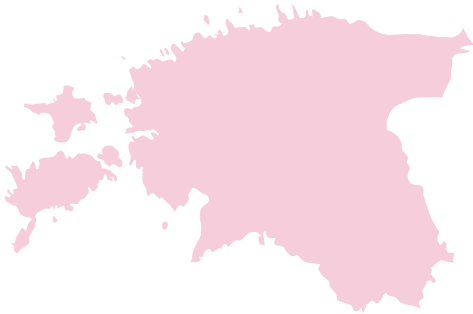
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In 2007 ECC Estonia carried out a number of promotional activities with the aim to increase consumers' awareness about their rights in connection with cross-border purchases and to promote the centre and the whole ECC-Net.

As the main information channel for cross-border consumer issues, they regularly updated their website and published articles on consumers' cross-border rights in several national newspapers or magazines. The message about the Consumer Rights Day on 15 March – introduced also as European Consumer Day – was successfully reverberated on three TV-stations including the national television ETV, as well as on two radio stations and on different online media portals. Information about ECC Estonia and the ECC-Net was also published in printed material such as the "Citizens handbook". On Europe Day (9 May), ECC Estonia participated in a public open-air event, together with other EU Networks in Estonia (Europe Direct, EURES, European Movement of Estonia, Europass). Apart from raising consumers' awareness about their rights in the case of cross-border purchases, the event also strengthened the cooperation between the Centre and the above-mentioned networks.

In 2007 the number of cross-border complaints handled in ECC Estonia increased more than one third as compared to 2006.

ECC Estonia participated in the Network's major joint activities including the joint ECC-Net report "*Air Passenger Rights: Consumer Complaints 2006*" and the Euro Village event arranged by the German centre in Berlin (June). They further took part in a number of specific events, such as the Baltic Sea ADR seminar in Warsaw and the Baltic States working meeting in Vilnius and carried out a number of joint actions with neighbouring countries, such as a common leaflet on consumer rights in the Baltic States (in cooperation with ECCs Latvia and Lithuania) and joint information material for publication on the homepages of the Estonian and Finnish ECCs. They made study visits to two other ECCs (Greece and Spain) to gain and exchange experiences and with a view to strengthening the cooperation inside the Network. They were also a member of the working group preparing the Network's Cooperation Day 2007 held in Lisbon.

FINLAND

The year 2007 was a busy one at ECC Finland. By far the most important individual achievement was the opening of new website www.ecc.fi. Information about cross-border issues within the EU is available in three languages, Finnish, Swedish and English.

During 2007 ECC Finland has further developed contacts with the Commission's Permanent Representation in Finland as well as with the Euro-Info-Centre's network and SOLVIT. The Centre met consumers at the annual Travel Fair in January and took part in the Consumer Day preparations – this time the focus was on instant loans.

With 99 airline-related complaints ECC Finland met with the major Finnish Airline to establish a good working relationship with the complaints handling department and to discuss the "Air Passenger Rights notice" distributed by the airline.

ECC Finland published 21 press releases during 2007, most of them also in Swedish and English. The comparison on purchase of cameras from online stores in Europe and another one on price differences of hairdresser/barber services between Helsinki and Tallinn were among the most interesting topics. In addition the price comparison of foodstuffs in Helsinki and Tallinn carried out by the Finnish Consumer Research Centre in cooperation with the Consumer Agency and ECCs Finland and Estonia generated major media attention.

Case-wise two major cross-border problems out of the ordinary brought quite a bit of media attention and both information requests and complaints. In the first half of the year an importers obligation to provide guarantee services for products purchased in other Member States became a hot topic. In the latter part of the year mobile phone services offered by certain Belgian and Dutch companies became an issue. Finnish consumers received bills for the free ring tones they – mostly minors – had ordered. To complicate matters and to make the cross-border element unclear the billing took place through Finnish mobile operators who denied any responsibility and refused to deal with the complaints.

A seminar on intercultural communication in Oslo, the Presidency conference on cooperation with the CPC-authorities in Berlin – with a rapporteur's role in the workshop on timeshare – job exchange with colleagues at ECC France, the timeshare seminar in Karlstad and finally Cooperation Day in Lisbon gave ECC Finland a chance to compare notes with colleagues within the network.

ECC Finland participated in the network joint projects except the one on tourism.

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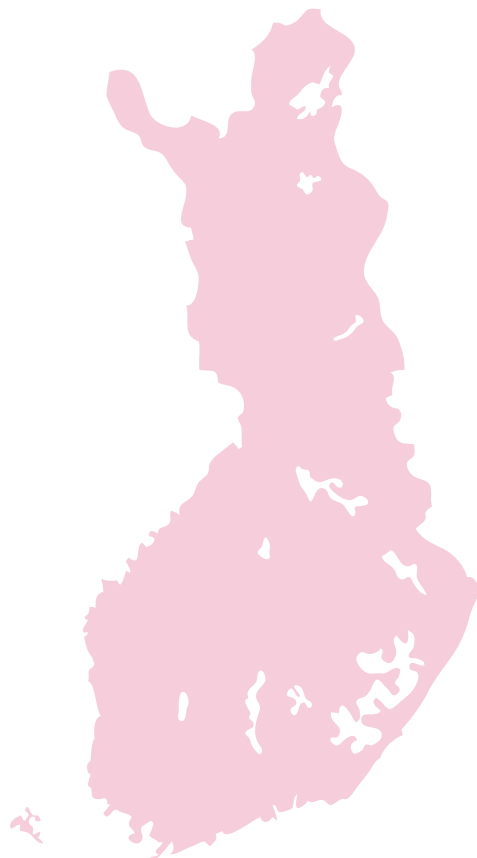
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Throughout 2007 ECC France concentrated on communication issues to make consumers, stakeholders and media aware of their existence and the services they provide to consumers within the EU. One of the highlights in 2007 was the visit of Commissioner Kuneva in July to the French and German centres which are both located in Kehl. After a visit to the venues, the Centres explained to the Commissioner their case-handling work and the cooperation mechanisms between them.

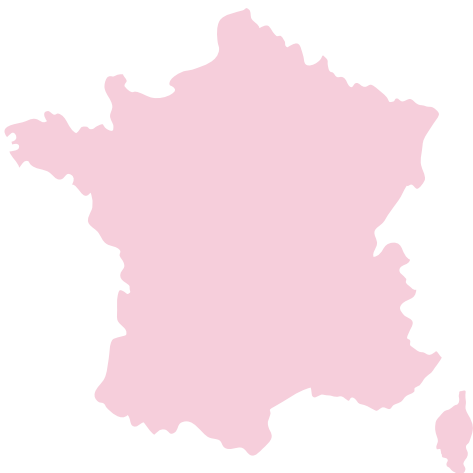
Another main event was the participation of ECC France in a conference organised by ECC Germany (Berlin, June) to examine the possibilities for cooperation between ECC-Net and CPC (cross-border enforcement and cooperation network). Representatives of the two European networks discussed for the first time how they could join their efforts to help consumers with cross-border complaints and disputes more effectively. After the event, they established regular contacts and meetings with the French CPC contact. ECC France was also present at the "European village" organised at the Brandenburg Gate on the occasion of the CPC-ECC event, participated in the "going local" event on Timeshare organised by the European Commission and gave lectures on cross-border consumer topics in universities.

The Centre dealt in 2007 especially with consumer questions regarding air passenger rights (in particular flight cancellation and delays as well as lost luggage) and e-commerce cases (especially non-delivery and guarantee issues). To speed up the case-handling procedures in the interest of European consumers, they established regular contacts with businesses in both fields and with the ADR (out-of-court dispute settlement) bodies in the e-commerce sector.

In the ADR field ECC France continued the cooperation with the different ADRs notified to the European Commission, and they informed stakeholders about the need for ADR bodies in other sectors. They started to prepare up-coming events for 2008 e.g. a conference on ADR and tourism to be held under the French Presidency and an ADR workshop which will be organised jointly with ECCs Belgium and Germany.

Together with ECCs Germany and Spain, they coordinated the Network's joint project on tourism and, jointly with ECCs Germany, Estonia and Slovakia, they prepared the working sessions for the Network's Cooperation Day in Lisbon as well as its follow-up.

Throughout the whole year, ECC France shared their experiences and knowledge about cross-border and European consumer protection issues with stakeholders, the European Parliament and the European Commission.



GERMANY

One of the 2007 highlights for ECC Germany was the conference organised by them in Berlin (June) to examine the possibilities for cooperation between ECC-Net and CPC (cross-border enforcement and cooperation network). The event was attended by Commissioner Kuneva, the Minister for Food and Rural Areas of Baden-Württemberg Hauk, representatives from ministries of several Member States, the European Commission and 25 ECCs. Representatives of the two networks discussed for the first time how they could join their efforts to help consumers with cross-border complaints and disputes more effectively. The conference was followed by a public event at the Brandenburg Gate, the "European village", at which the different ECCs presented themselves and their work.

In 2007 the German centre dealt again mainly with 'classical' consumer issues, with the number of cases increasing continuously throughout the year. Especially Discount Holiday Clubs have been a reason for the consumer to seek information and to file complaints. Furthermore, air passengers' rights, in particular flight cancellation and delays as well as lost luggage, as well as the whole e-commerce sector represented a large part of consumer complaints. Numerous complaints in 2007 concerned the filling out of internet forms, such as participation in surveys or to receive cooking recipes, where the consumer was not aware that the service would cost something. Cross-border health issues – especially reimbursement for treatments received in another EU Member State and the lack of acceptance of the European Insurance Card in medical facilities caused many problems for consumers. A lot of information requests concerned health insurance and nursing insurance matters when moving to another EU Member State. For many consumers, legal provisions as regards European health insurance protection are unclear and difficult to understand. The flyer "Zum Arzt im Ausland", published by ECC Germany in printed version as well as via internet, was requested by more than 5000 consumers.

After having reviewed the list of ADR (out of court dispute settlement) bodies by the end of 2006 together with the Federal Ministry of Justice, and following their recommendations for notification of new bodies especially in the banking and insurance sector, ECC Germany raised interest among more ADR bodies, especially in the medical and energy sector, to open up their procedures for European consumers.

Together with ECCs France and Spain, the centre coordinated the joint project on tourism: numerous information flyers on tourism in the different EU Member States were and will be produced under this project in English language. The flyers are part of a library and each ECC is free to translate them into their language. Together with ECCs France, Estonia and Slovakia, ECC Germany prepared the working sessions for the Network's Cooperation Day in Lisbon as well as its follow-up.

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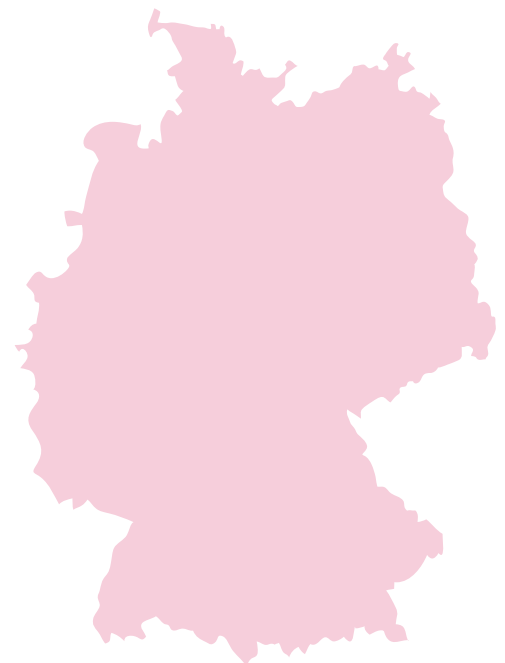
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ECC Greece focused its promotional activities for 2007 on two focal points: increasing *visibility*, and consolidating *European consumer conscience* and awareness. To that end ECC Greece produced 3 leaflets: 'ECC Presentation', 'Air Passenger Rights' and 'E-commerce', and one ECC-Net survey: 'ECC Consults and Protects: Air Passenger Rights', as well as pens and note pads. Our eight press releases in total led to 47 articles plus nine TV and twelve Radio interviews. The Centre also sent quarterly reports to the Greek Prefectures and Chambers of Commerce and Industry informing them on its activities, in an attempt to enhance cooperation in both handling of cases and consumer awareness.

Moreover, ECC Greece managed to have our link in the websites of the following bodies: the largest airport of Greece – EL. Venizelos, the Consumer Ombudsman, the Hellenic Ombudsman for Banking-Investment Services, and naturally the Consumer General Secretariat.

The promotional activities of ECC Greece for 2007 comprised the dissemination of leaflets nationwide mainly via the Citizen Service Centres, the Consumer Unions, the National Prefectures, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the European Parliament and Commission headquarters in Athens, the major national airports, our info stands in the Ministry of Development, as well as in conferences and exhibitions.

ECC Greece also engaged in the European Commission campaign "You Choose!" on the liberalisation of the energy market; responded to requests for consultation – e.g. the revision of the Timeshare directive; answered questionnaires – e.g. on the consumer acquis; promoted Commissioner Kuneva's initiative for a "Web chat on Christmas toy safety" through a press release to the media, stakeholders, consumer unions, and a notice in our website; participated in ECC-Net joint projects, providing input on the state of play in Greece – e.g. Joint projects on air passengers' complaints and on tourism; responded to requests for help from other ECCs – e.g. the ECC Portugal on the 'business complaints book'.

ECC Greece organised two conferences. The first one on 'Air Passenger Rights' was held in Nafplion on 23-24 February 2007. The second one on 'ADR systems in Greece' was held on 3 November 2007 in Athens.

The Athens conference and the new publications which were produced in the second semester of 2007 led to a sharp increase in the number of cases during the second half of the year. ECC Greece dealt with 314 requests for information, 292 full and simple complaints and promoted three as disputes to ADR procedures.

HUNGARY

2007 was the first entire year in the activity of the European Consumer Centre Hungary. The first important event of the year was the visit of Meglena Kuneva, Commissioner for Consumers, on 6 February. The Commissioner held a press conference together with representatives from the Ministry responsible for consumer protection in Hungary.

ECC Hungary organised a conference with the National Federation of Associations for Consumer Protection in Hungary (NFACPH) on 'Legal disputes of consumer protection character in the practice of the reconciliation bodies and the European Consumer Centre'.

ECC Hungary organised in cooperation with the Regional Office of Europe Direct a competition for secondary school students on consumer protection under the title 'European Unicums'.

The Centre gave a speech at the national meeting of information providers on the EU (organised by the European Commission's Representation in Hungary), on the occasion of the 25-year jubilee conference of the National Association for Consumer Protection in Hungary.

The ECC published a 16-page appendix on consumer information about the EU in a consumer magazine called 'KOSÁR', issued leaflets on travel contracts as well as on e-commerce and gave TV and radio interviews several times during the year.

In October 2007 ECC Hungary participated in the programme called 'CIVILIÁDA' (national fair of civil organisations aiming to present their activity). The Hungarian Centre also attended several international events, including the Berlin Conference during the German Presidency and the Lisbon Conference under the Portuguese Presidency as well as the ADR workshop in Prague.

As a result of the information campaign 'Get to know your rights' supported by the European Commission and carried out by the National Association for Consumer Protection in Hungary (as the host organisation of the Centre) from November 2007 the number of consumers turning to ECC Hungary for advice was also remarkably increasing.

In the course of 2007 ECC Austria and ECC Luxembourg made study visits to ECC Hungary, while ECC Hungary visited the office of ECC Spain.

As regards joint actions, in 2007 the Centre took part in the projects 'Air Passenger Rights' and 'Howard the Shopping Assistant'.

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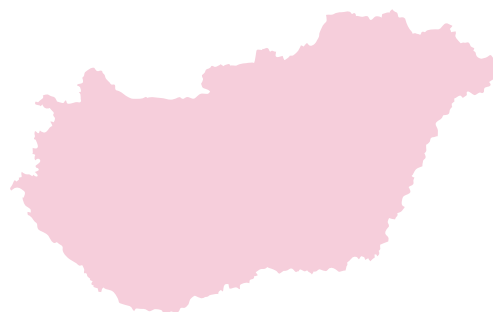
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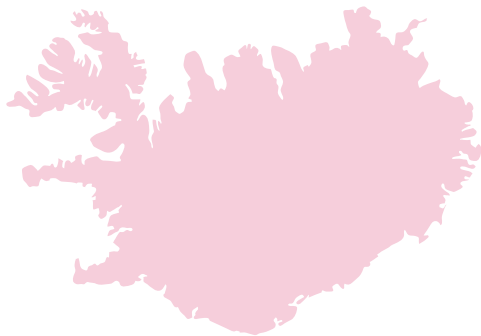
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The director of ECC Iceland gave several radio interviews in the year 2007, including one about roaming charges and one about Eurovision voting costs. The Consumers paper also published an article on one of the cases the ECC was working on and another one about shopping assistant Howard.

Also there were smaller interviews with the director and other members of staff in local papers – mostly focusing on the ECC-Net in general.

Furthermore the director and other members of staff wrote several articles published in an Iceland business journal – the subjects including:

- Trouble consumers face on the internal market and while making purchases over the internet,
- Roaming charges, new rules and how to save money while talking on your cell phone abroad,
- About the ECC-Net in general,
- About the various ADR bodies in Iceland
- About time-share.

The director also wrote several internet articles intended for Icelandic consumers and published on the webpage of the Consumers Association (www.ns.is). These articles focused among other things on the dangers of buying fake products, the dangers of lottery scams, Icelandic custom and taxes when buying products over the internet, and air passengers rights.

Then there were, especially late in the year, some efforts to upload and post more news on the ECC webpage but that is of course an ongoing project.

ECC Iceland took part in four Net-meetings in Brussels in the year 2007, as well as Cooperation Day in Lisbon. Furthermore, ECC Iceland took part in a Nordic meeting in Copenhagen in September, so as to strengthen the relationship between the Nordic countries. ECC Iceland has also taken part in the joint project on tourism and made leaflets on tourism.

ECC Iceland answered questionnaires including the one about air passengers rights, and also smaller questionnaires from several ECCs including Italy, Ireland, Slovakia, Portugal, Lithuania, Germany. ECC-Iceland also conducted a small survey on Eurovision voting costs.

IRELAND

In 2007 to promote the message of travellers' rights, ECC Ireland produced a leaflet where a character called *Lazy Larry* explained what rights consumers have when going on holidays. This was distributed via all travel agents in Ireland. In relation to air travel, ECC Ireland visited Dublin airport to distribute luggage tags promoting air passenger rights. ECC Ireland carried an online advertisement on the topic and issued two press releases on the topic, coinciding with the publication of the second ECC-Net *Report on Air Passenger Complaints*. The Report, co-authored by ECC Ireland, found the number of complaints relating to air passenger rights had almost doubled (96%); the primary areas of complaint remained unchanged (luggage, cancellations and delay) and that almost one third of complaints still remained unresolved. ECC Ireland took part in the press launch organised by ECC Belgium for the launch of the Report in December and generated 24 media articles/interviews on this topic in Ireland in that month alone.

ECC Ireland engaged in a lot of media work in order to bring issues to consumers' attention, resulting in 205 interviews or articles in total. Another area which received a lot of press attention in 2007 was shopping online. In November particular focus was given to this topic with the Irish launch of *Howard – the Shopping Assistant*. Howard is an online tool, available at www.eccdublin.ie, which gives you advice on your rights when shopping online.

ECC Ireland also engaged in the development of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) bodies, by working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment. This resulted in two successful new nominations to the European Commission's notified list of ADR bodies in 2007: the Financial Ombudsman and the Direct Selling Association of Ireland.

ECC Ireland engaged with other ECCs on the activities mentioned above and also acted as mentor to the ECC UK which re-established and re-opened in the summer of 2007. ECC Ireland also received study visits from ECCs Denmark, Cyprus, Italy and Norway during the year. ECC Ireland conducted a staff exchange with ECC Sweden, organising the timing to ensure Irish participation in ECC Sweden's timeshare seminar in November.

ECC Ireland continued to participate in an information exchange group in Ireland consisting of European-focused organisations and projects and also ensured the continued cooperation and creation of synergies with other organisations such as the National Consumer Agency, Citizens Information Centres, the Commission for Aviation Regulation, the European Commission Representation and Parliament in Ireland and the Consumer Council of Northern Ireland. In order to further spread information on European consumer rights and to cooperate with relevant organisations, ECC Ireland also gave presentations at seminars and conferences.

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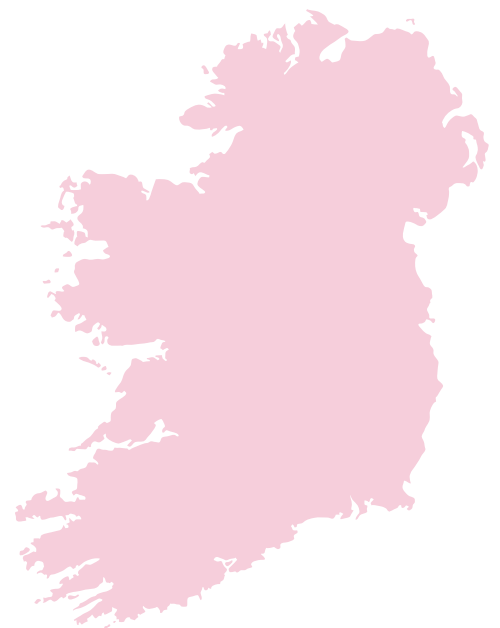
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In 2007 ECC Italy has been committed to a huge communication activity. Thus, some publications have been issued and the web site has been continuously updated and enriched by some special sections targeted to students, teachers, companies and mass media. Several public events took place all over Italy involving representatives of NGOs, civil society and business organisations. Ten meetings with consumers and associations were held (in the cities of Padova, Mestre, Viterbo, Firenze, Modena, Ferrara, Trapani, Agrigento, Taranto and Salerno) in cooperation with the National Federation of Retired persons and the trade Union CISL.

A successful press conference was organised to present the European Consumer Day. The event was followed by a conference in a high-school in Rome specialised in tourism on 15 March. On the occasion of the 50 anniversary of the Rome Treaties, ECC Italy distributed its publications at the big "celebration fair" within the stand of the EU Policies Department of the Presidency of the Council of Ministries, which hosted the SOLVIT network's Italian representation. A major event on ADR was organised by ECC Italy in Arezzo, in the framework of the "Consumer Week". A lesson on EU consumer rights and consumer protection at cross-border level was given by ECC experts in the University of Padova, for the students of the Master in EU Legislation. Furthermore a study visit was hosted in ECC premises in Rome, for the students of the University La Sapienza.

ECC Italy joined a working group on air passengers' rights promoted by the association of airport management companies Assaeroporti and took part in the drawing-up work of a CD Rom on the Internal Market and its advantages for consumers promoted by the Italian Representation of the European Commission.

ECC Italy has also carried out dialogue and negotiation activity with business associations and has always been in contact with national authorities operating in the field of consumer protection such as ENAC (the Italian NEB in charge of air passengers' rights enforcement). Finally, a strict cooperation has been carried out with ADR bodies, namely "Risolvionline" (an ODR service) which dealt with almost all the disputes that ECC Italy was able to address to conciliation.

ECC Italy has taken part in the joint projects carried out by the Network. ECC Italy joined the "You Choose!" information campaign run by the European Commission on the liberalization of energy markets. The study visit to ECC Ireland improved mutual knowledge and strengthened the collaboration with this Centre: the main issue was air transport because of the large amount of consumer complaints shared between the two Centres.

ECC Latvia's main objective in 2007 was to raise consumers' awareness of their rights and to inform them of the existence of the Centre. They disseminated articles on consumer issues through the largest daily newspaper Diena, published three press releases in the newspaper Daily Business and updated their website with a variety of consumer information. They cooperated with three of the Consumer Rights Protection Centre's ("CRPC") regional offices distributing publications through them. They continued the cooperation with Latvian Radio participating four times in one-hour live discussions on aspects related to e-commerce, consumers' rights during travel, goods warranties within the EU and issues relating to EU law.

To improve consumers' knowledge about air passengers' rights in the EU, they arranged on 17 August, in cooperation with CRPC, the informative event Know and Fly. The Centre's booklet "Your Air Passenger's Rights in the EU" was distributed on this occasion. On 15 March – European Consumers Day – they were present at the conference organised by CRPC "Questioning Citizens about Consumers' Rights" in which the Latvian Minister of Economics and representatives from the media participated. They used the event to distribute their publications on EU law in the sphere of e-commerce, package travel and ECC activities. In cooperation with CRPC, they arranged an "open day" on 9 May – Europe Day – in which a small group of senior-grade Latvian secondary school students participated. Complex tourism services, air passengers' rights and shopping in internet shops across the EU were among the topics discussed. On November 23 an information seminar organised by the Association for Protection of Consumers' Rights took place.

Within the Network, ECC Latvia participated in the joint report "Air Passenger Rights: Consumer Complaints 2006" as well as the "European village" organised in Berlin on the occasion of the ECC-CPC conference in June.

The biggest share of the consumer queries received by the Centre in 2007 was in the area of air passenger rights. About 50% of the total number of complaints received were settled in favour of the consumers.

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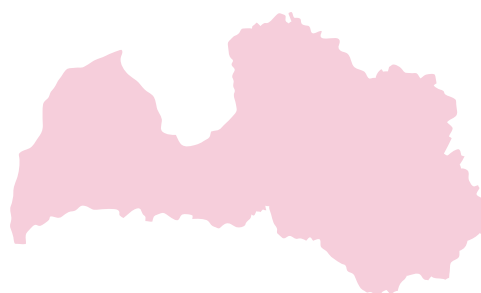
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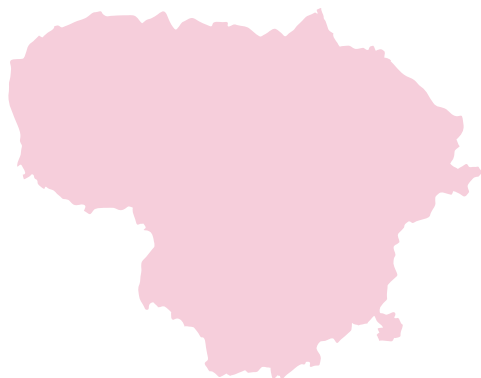
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In 2007 the ECC Lithuania produced and published twelve publications, five press releases, and published twenty articles in the media, participated in seven radio programmes and three TV programmes, produced two promotional items, provided the information on the ECC in seven information channels, and published 25 publications on several websites, presented the ECC activities in seminars, national conferences and trainings (eleven events in total), and organised the seminar 'Distribution of the information on consumer rights in the tourism sector in Lithuania'. The ECC with the European Commission Representation Office in Lithuania organised an event to celebrate the European Consumer Day, and organised the conference 'Lithuanian consumer in the Single Market: the present and perspectives'; organised the international conference 'Alternative Dispute Resolution – More opportunities For Consumers' and the seminar 'Internet Fraud and Consumer Protection'.

The ECC organised the seminar for young people in cooperation with Mykolas Romeris University. During the seminar students and the University staff discussed the main problems encountered by young consumers. Since the last year there is a separate subject on consumer rights protection taught at M. Romeris University.

The ECC Lithuania organized two seminars in Vilnius Employment Office, Youth Centre, which were intended to present the ECC and discuss the relevant problems encountered by consumers throughout Europe. The ECC also organised the International Conference on ADR in which the ECCs of Estonia, Latvia and Norway participated and presented their national ADR systems.

The ECC Lithuania participated in the joint project on Air Passengers' Rights.

The ECC representative visited the ECC Sweden to share experience and analyze the problems encountered by the ECCs in Sweden and Lithuania. The ECC employees participated in the conferences held by other ECCs (the International Conference in Germany 'Cross-border Consumer Protection: Perspectives of the Cooperation between the Network for the National Enforcement Bodies and the ECC-Net', and in the seminar held on Poland 'The Baltic Sea Region Seminar on ADR Consolidation'). The ECC attended the Cooperation Day where all the ECCs participated, and discussed future and joint projects of the ECC-Net.

The ECC published a book for consumers travelling in the Baltic States. This book is a result of the joint project of the ECC Lithuania, the ECC Latvia and the ECC Estonia. This book includes general information necessary for consumers in the Baltic States. The book is published in English, German, Swedish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian languages.

LUXEMBURG

ECC Luxembourg focused on numerous promotional activities in 2007. The highlight of the year 2007 for the ECC Luxembourg was undoubtedly the international conference that the ECC Luxembourg has organised in the “Abbaye de Neumünster” in Luxembourg City on 10 October 2007 entitled “Second conference on aspects of European consumer law”. The conference has been opened by the Luxembourg Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade, Mr Jeannot Krecké.

Furthermore, the ECC Luxembourg has published a new brochure in French and German for students studying abroad and being confronted by possible problems related to rent contracts. The ECC Luxembourg published also a consumer guide for consumers visiting Luxembourg in English, French and German. For the first time a “senior version” with bigger characters has been realised in order to make it more readable for elderly people.

The Centre published ten newsletters, sent out 29 press releases and gave numerous interviews to newspapers and radio. The Centre participated during 2007 in four fairs in Luxembourg which gave a very good opportunity to get into contact with consumers and to distribute information material. Furthermore, the staff of ECC Luxembourg distributed at the main train station of Luxembourg information and promotional material to consumers travelling abroad.

Concerning the Alternative Dispute Resolution sector, the ECC Luxembourg was in 2007 in permanent contact with the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade in order to contribute to the development of the ADR-scheme in Luxembourg. Furthermore, the Centre published in 2007 the totally updated brochure about the different ADR bodies in Luxembourg in French and German.

ECC Luxembourg, in close collaboration with the Representation of the European Commission in Luxembourg, maintains, since July 2007, a special consultation service for consumers once a week at the premises of the “Maison de l’Europe” in Luxembourg City.

The ECC Luxembourg attended a conference in Berlin organised by the ECC Germany as well as the Cooperation Day in Lisbon organised by the ECC Portugal, made a study visit to ECC Hungary and a staff exchange with the ECC Austria and the ECC Germany office and welcomed the study visit of ECC Lithuania.

Concerning the joint actions, the ECC Luxembourg participated mainly in the joint project of the ECC-Net about air passenger rights, which results in the air passenger rights report presented to the public and the press in December 2007 as well as in the common project on tourism in Europe.

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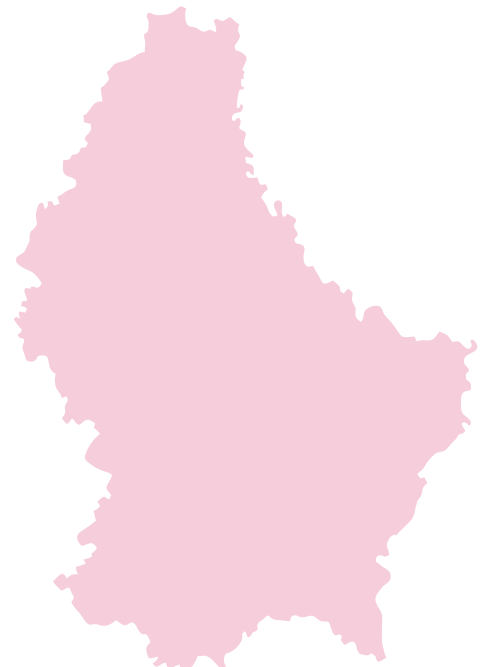
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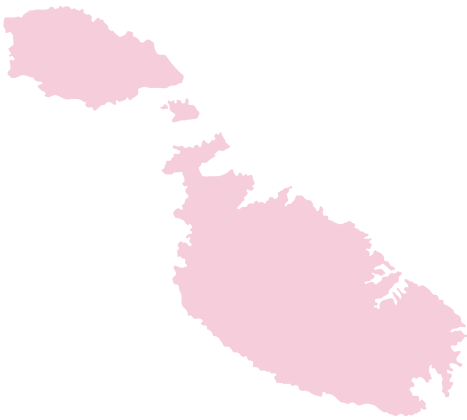
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The European Consumer Centre of Malta was revamped and re-launched on 10 September 2007. The Centre's new offices, 'Consumer House', which also accommodates the Consumers' Association of Malta, were inaugurated by Meglena Kuneva, Commissioner for Consumers and the Hon. Censu Galea, Minister for Competitiveness and Communications. The launch enjoyed noteworthy press coverage and was well attended; amongst those present were Malta's Permanent Representative to the EU H.E. Richard Cachia Caruana and the Head of the EU representation in Malta Dr. Joanna Drake.

On the same day the Commission's information campaign for consumers was also launched in Malta. ECC Malta played a fundamental role in the operation of this campaign as our contact details appeared on all campaign materials as the entity to contact for more information; in fact, most queries and requests for information generated by the campaign were handled by the ECC with the national requests requiring more detailed advice being signposted to the Consumer and Competition Division and the Consumers' Association.

Once operating from 'Consumer House' which is situated in South Street in Valletta, a very central area in Malta's capital, the ECC focused mainly on the complaints component of its work plan.

The ECC of Malta launched its website also in September, www.eccnetmalta.gov.mt, which is gradually being updated with news and other information and had an article published on 'Fair Deal' – a quarterly newsletter issued by the Consumer and Competition Division.

ECC Malta participated in the tourism joint project in 2007 by issuing some of the leaflets, upon the base model provided by ECC France, and by co-operating in the organisation of a conference organised by ECC Spain in Torremolinos. ECC Malta contributed by finding a Maltese speaker, who presented his paper on responsible consumption in the tourism industry, detailing an eco-certification scheme operated by the Malta Tourism Authority for hotels, at the conference.

ECC Malta also submitted its complaints statistics relating to air passenger complaints for 2006 for the ECC-Net Air Passenger Complaints Report 2006 launched in December 2007.

ECC Malta is also a campaign associate for the 'You Choose!' campaign on the opening up of energy and gas markets. ECC Malta is promoting this campaign through its website.

THE NETHERLANDS

On 1 January 2007 the European Consumer Centre started at a new host structure. At the head office of the Legal Service Counter (Het Juridisch Loket) in Utrecht an office was equipped.

The Dutch ECC kept its contacts with the Dutch Foundation for Complaints Boards warm by making working arrangements in which the Dutch ECC and our colleagues in the ECC-Net are the intermediary between a European consumer outside the Netherlands with a complaint concerning a Dutch trader and the Foundation for Complaints Board at which the consumer can file his complaint for dispute handling. Regular discussions of progress were established.

In the Netherlands the ADR on financial services developed further into Kifid, which became operational.

The Dutch ECC has promoted its activities throughout the Netherlands, among other things through presentations on our ECC-Net and its activities at thirty Legal Service Counters.

The assistance the ECC provides to consumers, Dutch and foreign, was intensified by the assessment of an additional lawyer to complement the ECC-team.

With the knowledge, expertise and good contacts available the Dutch ECC team (2.8 fte) was able to provide for consumers' requests for information with swift and useful answers via phone and e-mail. Many complaints were solved with the good cooperation of many Dutch traders. The case handling was professionalized by the use of the IT-tool, which started on 1 January 2007. The IT-tool provides a good basis on which the communication between ECC's can be statistically mapped and assists case handlers with their communication among each other.

The ECC participated in the joint projects on Tourism in Europe and Air Passengers' Rights Report 2006. The Air Passengers' Rights Report was published in December 2007 and generated a lot of positive media coverage in the Netherlands.

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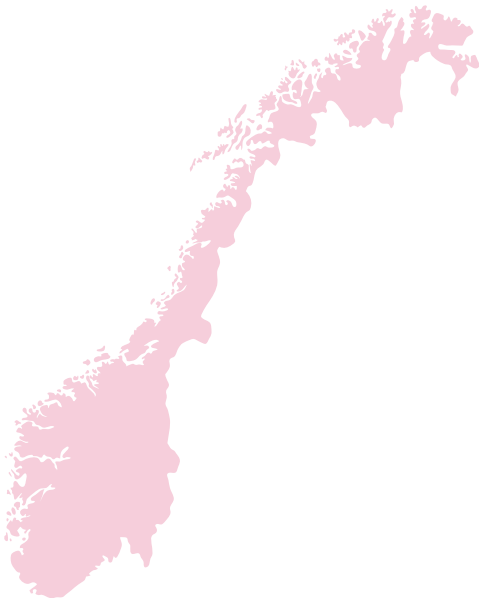
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Forbruker Europa/European Consumer Centre Norway was officially established on 1 January 2006. As with the other ECCs, we are funded partially by the European Commission and partially by our host organisation, the Consumer Council of Norway.

In 2007 ECC Norway continued efforts to inform and assist consumers on their rights within the EU/EEA area. The ECC's activities have mainly been related to media campaigns, providing consumers with information through brochures, telephone and the internet, cooperating with other entities to further enhance cross-border consumer protection, and giving consumers assistance in concrete cases.

ECC Norway has successfully advised and intervened on behalf of a number of consumers to get refunds from credit providers, particularly in relation to holiday club contracts.

ECC Norway frequently forwards complaints received from European consumers to the national complaint boards on air transport. Provided the claim is not ill-founded, consumers generally obtain redress.

In relation to the launch of Howard the shopping assistant, the ECC made mouse pads and credit card-sized information leaflets giving consumers information on basic issues they must keep in mind when shopping online.

The seminar on Norwegian Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) bodies covered both international private law issues and a description of out of court settlement systems in selected European countries. ECC Norway also participated with a presentation on the Norwegian out of court dispute settlement system at the ADR conference organised by ECC Lithuania. ECC Norway held a seminar with participants from most ECCs on cross-cultural communication.

The ECC's new website was launched providing more information to consumers. The ECC has been working throughout 2007 to expand the information contained on the ECC's website, both in Norwegian and English.

ECC Norway had a study visit to ECC Dublin to learn how they are handling cases, media campaigns etc.

POLAND

The European Consumer Centre (ECC) in Poland set up in January 2005, promotes consumer confidence in the European internal market. The ECC Poland deals with consumer cross-border problems and promotes consumer rights by disseminating information, advertising and supporting media relations. The Centre cooperates actively with consumer organisations in Poland and participates in joint projects undertaken by all the ECC-Net.

ECC Poland focused its promotional activity on the air passengers' rights topic and safe holidays. The ECC published brochures and leaflets promoting consumer rights: "Travelling and shopping in Europe", "Air passenger rights & luggage problems", "Car rental", the general leaflet about European Consumer Centres' and Annual Report.

Promotional materials were distributed to regional European Information Centres in 16 voivodeships, to Europe Direct local offices, to the European Information Centre in Warsaw and European Info point in the Commission Representation in Poland and also via 366 regional Consumer Advocates. Special distribution took place during the Schuman Parade on 12 May, where ECC had a stand on the main street in Warsaw in the European village with informational materials.

ECC issued 25 press releases which resulted with ten TV interviews, 16 radio interviews, 126 press articles and 79 internet publications. The Centre organised three press conferences: on the occasion of World Consumer Day, "Consumer after Holidays" which was supported by the advertising campaign on the biggest Polish internet portals with use of several different banners and the launch of ECC-Net Air Passengers Rights Report in which Centre took part.

ECC Poland published on their website 56 news items including announcements of public open lectures. The Centre issued 11 editions of a monthly electronic newsletter.

ECC Poland was host of the 3rd ADR Seminar of Baltic Countries. The seminar took place on 15 October and was dedicated to the problem of ADR schemes accessibility for European consumers. The 3rd Baltic Sea Countries Seminar on ADR brought together the representatives of European Consumer Centres and special guests from ADR for public banks in Germany, from Polish Trade Inspection, from the Swedish Consumer Complaints Board and the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection in Poland.

ECC Poland prepared the report "State of Play in ADR for 2007" – the picture of ADR system in Poland. The report was provided for the OCCP as a help in the state activity and for identification, nomination and notification of out-of-court mechanisms competent in resolving consumer disputes.

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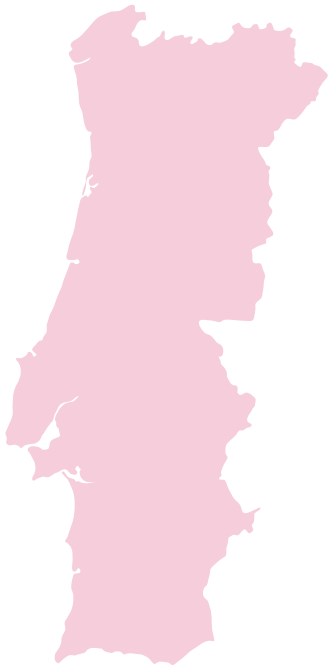
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In 2007 the centre focused on assistance to consumers and on information campaigns. They published seven leaflets on different topics and two-monthly e-newsletters which were widely distributed over the whole territory with the help of various stakeholders. Media contacts included press releases and articles/appearances in newspapers and television. The ECC also gave training and information sessions.

Mirroring the main case problem areas observed and taking into account the importance of the tourism sector, the topics covered by the ECC's publications were air transport and e-commerce as well as the purchase of real estate in Portugal by consumers from other EU Member States. The large number of immigrants to Portugal led them to issue also a leaflet concerning money transfers and they started to inform consumers on the upcoming SEPA (Single Euro Payment Area).

The majority of the complaints received were presented by Portuguese consumers and the trader involved was in the majority of the cases located in Spain. As in 2006, the main problem encountered was in relation to air travel: queries in this category represented 38% of the total number of contacts. The large part of the complaints related to travel concerned luggage on air travel, followed by passenger problems. Another widely complained-about issue was timeshare. The purchase of audiovisual photographic and information processing equipment also continues to be a very complained-about area.

In direct cooperation with the Consumer Directorate-General, the ECC also continued their efforts to promote alternative means for the resolution of conflicts, helping with the development of a project to create a national consumer affairs ADR to cover the whole territory. They participated in a conference held by the CIAB – Centro de Informação e Arbitragem do Vale do Cávado – and presented the theme “Arbitrage as a privileged form of resolving consumer conflicts”. The ECC was also present at the conference “Consumer relations in the XXI century – from the traditional commerce to e-commerce” hosted by CIMAAL. Collaboration with the different existing structures has made it possible to transfer 21 consumer disputes which would have remained unsolved otherwise.

Within ECC-Net, they hosted the Network's Cooperation Day in November in Lisbon, contributed to the joint report “*Air Passenger Rights: Consumer Complaints 2006*” and participated in the Berlin Conference (June) hosted by the ECC Germany and the “European Village” organised on the same occasion. They also participated in the preparation of the Tourism Conference held in Malaga by ECC Spain where the quality of hotels and standardisation were discussed among other topics. In the second half on the year, they supported the Portuguese Presidency on several cross-border related questions.

SLOVAKIA

In 2007 the Slovak Centre focused on informing consumers about their rights regarding certain trader practices and providing them with assistance with cross-border complaints. They disseminated their publications and promotional material to consumers, high schools, the airport, and institutions in the consumer protection field, and they kept their website updated. They had a total of eight media outputs on radio, television and newspapers.

The key tasks of the ECCs were to advise and assist consumers with their cross-border complaints and to inform them of the possibilities for out-of-court settlement. Most of the consumers' cross-border complaints related to air passengers' rights (delayed or cancelled flights, lost or damaged baggage), online purchases (problems with bank transfers, damaged goods), electronics and used cars.

ECC Slovakia participated in the Network's joint project "Tourism in Europe", the joint report "Air Passenger Rights: Consumer Complaints 2006", and the energy consumer campaign 'You Choose!' carried out by the European Commission. There was a close cooperation with the Regulatory Office for Network Industries in this field. Besides Network meetings organised by the Commission, ECC Slovakia also took part in the preparatory group of the Network's Cooperation Day held in Lisbon and the follow-up.

On the occasion of a visit of the Finnish Centre towards the end of the year, a small seminar on out-of-court dispute settlement (ADR) systems was organised with the participation of representatives from the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, the Slovak Institute for Mediation and NGOs which are the most involved in consumer complaints handling.

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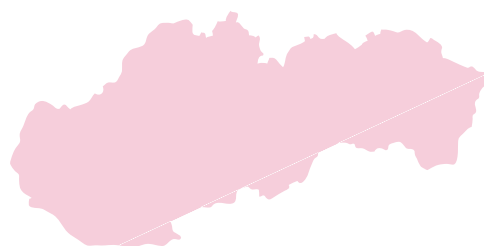
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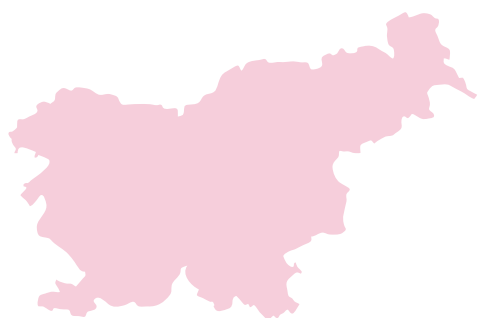
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As the ECC Slovenia was opened for consumers only in December 2006, and the year 2007 was the first year in which the Centre was operating all 12 months, more attention was given to promotion of the centre.

ECC Slovenia prepared the following information and promotional material: paper bookmark with the contact details which were disseminated at the faculties, public libraries and Europe Direct info points; leaflet "Shopping in Europe" for consumers from Slovenia; leaflet "Shopping in Slovenia"; booklet "Shopping in Slovenia" in English language, with information on consumer rights in Slovenia and other useful information for visitors of Slovenia. In addition, a permanent page was dedicated to ECC Slovenia's activities in the national monthly magazine for consumers "VIP", where ECC Slovenia presented interesting cases and advices for consumers regarding their consumer rights etc.

ECC Slovenia also promoted activities focused on different target groups (journalists, general public, NGOs dealing with consumer issues, EU networks, elderly consumers, students). In 2007 ECC Slovenia realised the following promotion and information activities:

- Stand with information materials on the three-days fair "Tourism and leisure time",
- Stand with information materials on the two-days fair for students "Študentska arena",
- Workshop for pensioners on consumer rights in the EU "Shopping in Europe",
- Presentation of the ECC Slovenia and ECC-Net for the organisations working in the consumer protection field and for media,
- Presentation of the ECC Slovenia and ECC-Net to the other European networks (SOLVIT, EUROPE DIRECT; Era More, CCP...),
- Permanent contacts with media: newspapers, magazines, radio, TV (six live radio emissions on national and local radio stations).

ECC Slovenia took part in the joint project "Tourist". In 2007 ECC Slovenia prepared four leaflets with the relevant information for visitors of Slovenia on arrival by plane, by car, health care and shopping. ECC Slovenia also took part in the joint project "Tourism in the Mediterranean". The joint project was coordinated by the ECC Spain. ECC Slovenia took part in the workshop for the Mediterranean countries in February 2007 and also in the conference on tourism in the Mediterranean Basin on 30 and 31 October 2007 "Quality is profitable"

SPAIN

The European Consumer Centre in Spain started the year with a full agenda and participated in numerous workshops and seminars during the year including Information Days in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Malaga, working days with consumer associations on tourism, focusing mainly on timeshare and tourism.

In 2007 the Centre organised conferences on air passengers' rights and e-commerce to show up unfair commercial practices from some specific traders. On 15 March, to celebrate Consumer Day, the European Commission Representation in Madrid together with ECC Spain organised a conference for a selected group of secondary level students to warn them about safety rules to take into account when surfing on the internet and giving advises to make a sure buying.

In November a meeting was held about "Security and Criminal Acts on the internet: How to educate consumers to do a secure use of the internet", where ECC Spain gave a speech about the confidence of the European citizens on the e-commerce market.

The Centre participated in collaboration with the Bank of Spain, member of FIN-NET, in the "International Course on Financial consumers Protection", where the Centre made a presentation on the ECC-Network.

ECC Spain received study visits from ECC Estonia and ECC Hungary to share experiences and make closer links between Centres.

Regarding relations with other European Networks the Centre had two meetings with Europe Direct: on 3-5 October the Annual general meeting for Europe Direct was held in Sitges, where ECC Spain presented a stand and answered questions about the activity of the ECC-Net coming from participants from all over Europe. In November a similar annual general meeting for Europe Direct was organised, but this time at national level - with the participation of the Spanish ECC.

ECC Spain kept a fluent relation with mass media and participated in several interviews and published many articles that have been published in different media. Due to the information campaign on holiday clubs throughout the year 2007 when distributing flyers at Malaga airport, the Spanish ECC got broad press coverage in different printed media, as well as TV and radio channels.

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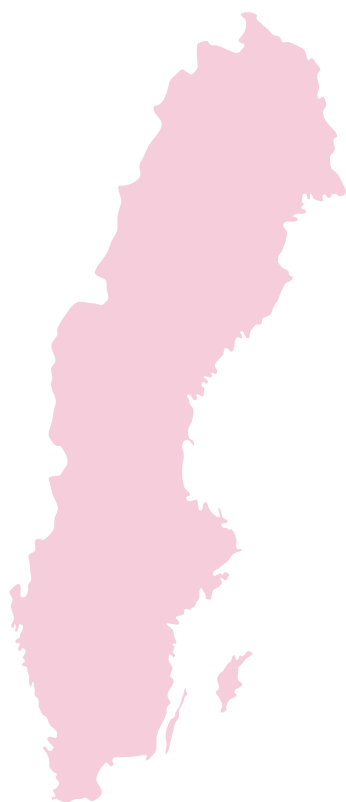
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The focus of the Swedish ECC in 2007 was given to timeshare and similar products and to air passengers' rights. In relation to timeshare and similar products ECC Sweden held a press conference in Stockholm in cooperation with the European Commission. The conference, which was due to the proposed new directive, generated a very high media attention. ECC Sweden produced a scratch card on holiday clubs which is distributed by Swedish travel agencies to Swedish travellers on the Canary Islands. The scratch card was also distributed at the Karlstad airport, an event that also was much reported in the media. To discuss and improve case-handling ECC Sweden arranged a successful workshop on holiday clubs, which was attended by 11 ECC offices.

ECC Sweden co-authored the ECC-Net report on air passengers' rights together with ECC Belgium and ECC Ireland. Information to local consumer advisers regarding consumer rights in this area has been given on several occasions and to consumers at two open meetings.

In total, seven press releases were published with a result of some 120 media articles or interviews. The website had some 94 000 visits. To improve the information on e-commerce, the shopping assistant, Howard was launched. Howard informs consumers about the opportunities and dangers in cross-border e-commerce and gathers information to help consumers make better choices. Howard was presented in a press release and reported in several newspapers.

In relation to ADR development ECC Sweden has continued its cooperation with the Swedish National Board for Consumer Complaints and also participated in the Baltic Sea Seminar together with a representative of this Board.

ECC Sweden attended ECC-Net meetings and conferences, welcomed visits from ECC Greece and ECC Lithuania and made study visits to ECC Ireland. ECC Sweden participated in a joint working group on price comparisons. The National Board of Trade, which hosts SOLVIT, is now a member of the reference group together with the Board for Consumer Complaints, the Competition Authority, the Consumers Association, the Consumers Coalition and a representative for the local consumer advisers.

The host organisation of ECC Sweden is the Swedish Consumer Agency. This Agency is appointed as the National Enforcement Body when it comes to air passengers' rights as well as the Swedish member of the network Consumer Protection Cooperation. In both these respects there is a fruitful cooperation between ECC Sweden and the Consumer Agency.

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK European Consumer Centre is now being hosted by a new organisation, the Trading Standards Institute. The centre became operational mid-August 2007 with an official opening, being completed by the Minister for Consumer Affairs in the UK, Gareth Thomas, on 14 November 2007. The launch of the ECC UK was well attended by representatives from other consumer organisations in the UK and received coverage from the national media with press articles and radio interviews.

An example of some cases that have been resolved by ECC UK with the support of the ECC-Network.

The ECC UK has been unable to participate in any joint projects for 2007 due to its opening in August, but has already agreed to work with other members of the Network for a joint project on ADRs which will be completed in 2008.

The ECC UK has also taken advantage of the project completed by ECC Denmark, Howard – the shopping assistant, which has been added to their website to empower consumers to let them make the right choice when shopping online.

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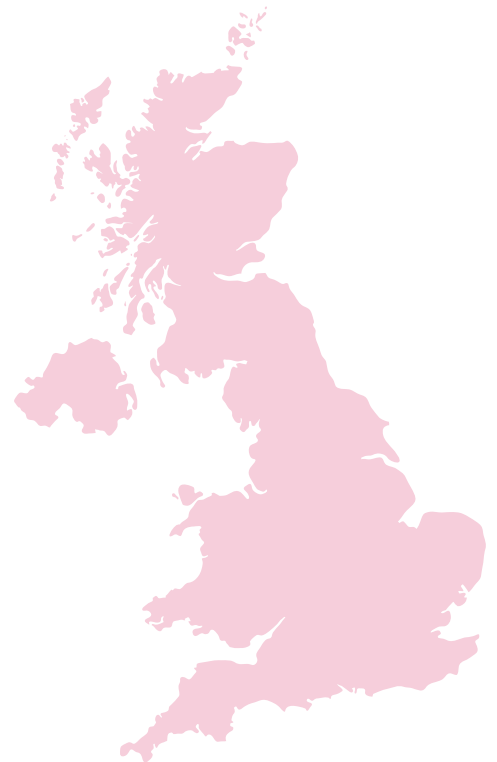
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