

## Consumers: European Consumer Centres' Air Passenger Rights Day 2011.

*Brussels, 7 July 2011 – Holiday didn't go as planned? Flight cancelled? Lost luggage? Help is at hand. The European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net) offer citizens free advice about their rights when travelling and shopping across borders. They can also help them solve problems with traders in another EU country (plus Iceland and Norway) when things go wrong. In 2010, the Centres provided free help and advice in over 71,000 consumer cases, and helped consumers with complaints worth 14 million euros. Since many of the complaints they receive concern transport, in particular air travel, the Network has organised a special 'Air Passenger Rights Day' at 27 airports (23 countries<sup>1</sup>) across the EU. Under the motto 'Pack a little consumer know-how, Europe offers you free help and advice', they will provide advice and help on air passenger rights, for example in cases of cancellations, delays or baggage loss.*

**Health and Consumer Commissioner John Dalli** said: *"I welcome this initiative by the European Consumer Centres which shows concretely how they are helping citizens with practical problems every day across the EU. This work is a clear example of EU added value, since no single national organisation can – on its own – effectively help consumers to resolve cross-border disputes with traders in a quick and inexpensive way. I look forward to more and more consumers managing to reap the benefits of the Internal Market thanks to the help of the ECC-Net "*

**Vice-president Kallas, responsible for Transport**, declared: *"Nowadays, EU rules protecting passengers exist in all modes of transport: they are already in force for air and rail and will be soon applicable also for waterborne and road passengers. Ensuring a widespread users' awareness is a precondition for a better enforcement of their rights in case of problem. The event today is perfectly linked with the ongoing information campaign on EU passenger rights that I launched one year ago also in Zaventem and I am glad to see that this helps citizens to be more aware of their rights"*

**Belgian Minister for Economy and Reform, Mr Vincent Van Quickenborne**, said: *"The number of cross-border consumer transactions continues to rise. But we must acknowledge that its development is sometimes hindered by a lack of knowledge on consumer rights when purchasing in another EU country. Therefore I am pleased to see that the European Consumer Centres not only inform citizens on their rights but also help solve so many cases amicably. This is good for consumers, good for business and good for the economy'.*

### Why this matters

EU citizens are shopping cross border more frequently, and this expenditure represents 1.75% of EU GDP. While the total detriment suffered by EU consumers amounts to 0.4% of Europe's GDP, the detriment related to cross border shopping (including internet) can be estimated between 500 million and 1 billion euros per year. The Centres help to reduce that figure by helping consumers to exercise their

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<sup>1</sup> AT, LV, LU, BG, SK, SI, CZ, PL, EE, NL, IE, ES, HU, NO, CY, PT, LT, IT, MT, BE, UK, RO, SE

rights successfully. In 2010 about 40% of consumer complaints handled by ECCs were amicably settled with the trader.

Giving consumers clear information about their rights and assuring them that they can get effective redress if they have a problem will improve their confidence and help unlock the full potential of the Single Market. The role of Centres in this regard is important since recent studies show that 79% of EU citizens do not know where to get information and advice about cross-border shopping in the EU.

## How did European Consumer Centres help in 2010?

This case study illustrates:

In the context of the volcano eruption in May 2010, some Finnish passengers were stranded in Spain when their **flight was cancelled** due to airspace closure. They chose re-routing and had to stay 7 extra days in Barcelona. The airline did not offer any assistance. Safely back home they contacted the airline and requested a refund of their expenses (€1,167). The airline only refunded €250. With Centres' help, the consumers were **refunded the remaining €917**. More ECC consumer stories at <http://ec.europa.eu/ecc-net>

European Consumer Centres also publish [consumer reports](#) on practical topics, from a comparison of hotel ratings to a survey of ski resorts in Europe.

## How do European Consumer Centres help?

The Centres operate in **29 countries** (all EU countries plus Norway and Iceland)<sup>2</sup>.

They offer online as well as direct advice for consumers to **help them avoid problems** when buying goods and services from a trader based in another EU country (as well as in Norway and Iceland)

When consumers do run into problems (e.g. with a refund, repair or replacement to which they are entitled to under EU rules) and for whatever reason have not been able reach an understanding with the trader, the Centres **can intervene on the consumers' behalf**. This often involves contacting the corresponding Centre in the country of the trader.

For cases concerning **air passenger rights** (such as problems obtaining assistance when stranded at an airport), the Centres work closely with 'national enforcement bodies' (NEBs) which make sure that air passenger rights are complied with and which have the exclusive power to investigate and enforce EU rules. The Centres can **help consumers obtain refunds and compensation**. For example, the Centres can contact the airline on behalf of the consumer, or, if necessary, file a complaint with the relevant NEB. The Centres can also advise consumers on taking their case to an out-of-court dispute resolution scheme.

They are co-financed by the European Commission and national authorities.

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<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/ebs/schedule.cfm>

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<sup>2</sup> The Centres are co-financed by the European Commission and national authorities.