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## **EU Commissioner Kuneva launches consumer rights campaign in Malta**

### **New Consumer House inaugurated in Valletta**

European Commissioner for Consumers Meglena Kuneva today launched a campaign in Malta informing Maltese citizens about their consumer rights both at home and in other EU countries. "EU laws have given consumers rights, but making laws is only one step towards empowering consumers", she said at a joint press conference in Valetta. "To make these rights work for you in practice, Maltese men and women need to know their rights, need to be reminded of them regularly, and need to know where to go for further information and advice".

Ms Kuneva and the Minister for Competitiveness and Competition Censu Galea also inaugurated the new Consumer House on South Street in Valletta. The Centre will house both the Maltese Consumer Association and the European Consumer Centre.

The information campaign launched by the European Commission in Malta will promote this Centre as a source for consumer-related information and advice. On the new Consumer House, Ms Kuneva said that the European Commission, together with the Maltese government, was committed to provide assistance to develop the expertise of this Centre over the coming years. *"The challenge will be to reach out, to become a point of reference and guidance, and a driving force, in consumer protection issues in Maltese society."*

Ms Kuneva, the first EU Commissioner with a specific portfolio on consumer affairs and the first Commissioner from Bulgaria, said that one of the primary aims of the campaign is to provide information on key rights. *"Experience in all EU countries, and in particular in those countries that joined the EU more recently, shows that there is a constant need for information, and that the EU can help and reinforce national efforts."*

Addressing a press conference in Valletta chaired by Dr Joanna Drake, the Head of the EU Representation in Malta along with the Minister Galea, Ms Kuneva said that an EU survey conducted a few months ago in Malta has shown that:

- 50 per cent of Maltese consumers aged between 25 and 45 years did not know what to do when an appliance they purchased did not work properly.
- 60 per cent of Maltese consumers admitted that they did not know their rights when shopping online, and
- about two-thirds of the respondents said that they did not know what to do if they encountered problems with their holiday package or their flight.

Ms Kuneva also said that the same survey revealed that 90 per cent of the Maltese felt that they would like to know more about their consumer rights. Focus group research conducted in February this year also indicated Maltese consumers feel they need more information about what their rights really are, and guidance on how to claim their rights. They further expressed a preference for short and funny messages as the best means of learning more, and showed interest in joining a consumer association.

The main message of the information campaign is that across the EU, consumers have rights and that citizens should insist on their rights as they are theirs by right! The campaign aims to be educational and informative yet light-hearted and humorous. Local TV personality Ray Calleja will be the face of the campaign. In a video release presented at the campaign launch he introduced the two characters, Ray and Sandra, that will feature in the advertising material.

The main themes of the campaign will concern consumer rights on product guarantees, on-line shopping and package holidays. Key rights in these areas will be promoted in radio and print advertising. Further explanation is given to Maltese consumers in three fact sheets that will be distributed by the new Consumer House and via the website of the Consumer Association.

As the campaign is rolled out over the coming months, consumer rights in different fields, such as rights when buying on credit or passenger rights, will be highlighted and explained in 9 further fact sheets. Consumers will also receive an informative publication about their main rights in the EU that will be distributed to all households in Malta and Gozo. The information campaign will be further reinforced through public relations, activities and events, billboards and through the Consumer Association website, which includes a specific section on the information campaign.

Mrs Kuneva also referred to another objective of the campaign: *“We want to work with the Maltese business community. Companies – large and small – need to know about consumer rights.”* Her message to the Maltese business community was to be “consumer friendly” and to adhere to best practice “beyond legal obligations”. She added that this was not a cost but a competitive advantage in today’s open and free market.

The campaign will include activities specially targeted at the business community, and also offer a booklet distributed to businesses, large and small, about key consumer protection obligations and rights.

Consumers looking for more information can contact the New Consumer House by phone on 21 22 1901 or access the website of the Consumer Association, [camalta.org](http://camalta.org). While the campaign provides information to all Maltese consumers, it particularly targets young adults, 25-45 year-olds.

The contract for the campaign was awarded after a competitive public procurement process launched in Brussels last year. Similar campaigns have been undertaken by the European Commission in Poland in 2005, in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2006 and will start this autumn in Cyprus and Hungary. Campaigns in remaining new Member States are scheduled for 2008 and 2009.

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