

Brussels, 3 September 2009

Consumers: EU invests in building independent consumer magazines and websites in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia

Consumers in Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia now have access to consumer magazines and websites, which provide independent, comparative testing of consumer products, following a three-year EU project co-financed by the European Commission. The final results of the programme, including a sample of 5 product studies and up-to-date circulation figures for the magazines were published today in Brussels. Over a three year period, the EU programme co-financed a total of 18 comparative tests, for use by consumer organisations, on a wide range of everyday products - from washing machines, to digital cameras, mobile phones, vacuum cleaners, child restraints, washing detergents, sun-tan lotions portable music players and TV sets. The aim of the EU programme is to provide finance, training and expertise to build the capacity of consumer organisations in testing products and publishing the results in consumer magazines.

EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva said: "The aim is to offer new consumers access to the most powerful weapon that a consumer can have: knowledge. I am talking about the knowledge about quality, safety and value or money of the products which they buy every day. I am happy that consumers in six more countries now have a trustworthy source of advice when shopping around for the best deal". She added: "Consumer advocates across Europe have been pooling their resources for years to deliver independent and reliable product research results that are now available to a larger group of European consumers".

Breda Kutin, publisher of the Slovenian consumer magazine "VIP" explained: "Consumers in new Member States are still frequently overwhelmed by the variety of products and wider choices they have gained in the open EU markets. Consumer associations and their publications have a key role to play in guiding them towards good value for money, especially now that times are getting harder".

The products tested as part of the project ranged from consumer electronics to sun-tan lotions and washing detergents. National brands from the six countries were included to increase the relevance of the results for national markets and to check for any quality differences.

"On the whole, it is interesting to see that product quality in appliances and electronic devices is generally stable throughout the EU, with some surprises", Guido Adriaenssens of International Consumer Research and Testing (ICRT) commented. "So consumers in countries like Poland have a real interest in checking tests results".

The project

The three-year project aimed to help start up or upgrade existing consumer magazines and websites in new EU countries by sharing know-how in market research, sample selection, test result evaluation as well as in publishing and marketing magazines and websites.

To achieve this, partnerships between consumer associations with extensive experience in consumer testing (from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland and the UK) and the new members were created.

The project ran from September 2006 for three years and was initiated by ICRT and the European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC). The total cost of the project was over €5 million, of which the European Commission financed over €1.6 million.

The cost of comparative laboratory research and testing of consumer products is very high. But major consumer associations in Western Europe have been successfully using a common pool of product tests which are run by an umbrella organisation, International Consumer Research and Testing (ICRT). They market these test results to their members or subscribers without having to rely on any advertising or sponsorship, and thus are able to remain independent. Without external start-up support, consumer organisations in the new EU countries would not have had the resources and the know-how to participate in the independent research and testing, and set up economically viable magazines and websites selling test results to consumers.

Next steps

As a result of the project, the beneficiary consumer associations have been able to build the capacity to run and market comparative product tests. They are now expected to operate independently as members of the ICRT network and as a professional subscription-based service for consumers.

To learn more

MEMO/09/371 includes more details on the project and the national partners.

Samples of the latest product test results for the six countries are available for members of the press on request (see the contact details below). The samples are for five product categories: mobile phones, personal music players, washing machines, vacuum cleaners and washing detergents. Full access to all test results is a paid service offered by the participating national consumer organisations (see the link below and [MEMO/09/371](#) for details).

Consumer associations, magazines and websites publishing test results

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/empowerment/cons_tests_en.htm

International Consumer Research and Testing

<http://www.international-testing.org/index.html>

European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC)

www.beuc.eu