

COMMISSIONER KUNEVA – SPEECH
PRESS CONFERENCE LAUNCH INFORMATION CAMPAIGN
MALTA – 10 SEPTEMBER 2007

Dear Minister, friends and members of the press

It is my great pleasure to be here with you in Valetta on this beautiful island.

I understand from your rich and colourful history that you have had many visitors before. You have always been at the crossroad of Europe and a bridge between cultures, civilizations and continents

Since Malta joined the EU in 2004 you have begun, like my own country Bulgaria, to see the first fruits of being part of a wider Europe.

The upcoming introduction of the Euro coins and bills is a measure of how well Maltese businesses have adapted to the challenge of economic integration.

But what exactly does EU membership do for the Maltese people? What difference has it, or can it, make to them in their day-to-day life?

I hope my presence here today, will show that the EU cares about its citizens. That we protect, inform and empower consumers. That we do not only make laws, rules and regulations, but help to make them work on the ground

EU laws have given consumers rights, both at home and in other EU countries. But making laws is only one step towards empowering consumers.

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.

A survey we conducted in March this year shows that:

- 50% of Maltese consumers between 25 and 40 years did not know what to do when an appliance they purchased does not work properly
- 60% say they don't know their rights when they are shopping on-line
- about two-thirds don't know what to do in case of problems with their holiday package or their flight

- and, above all, 90% feels they want to know more about their consumer rights

That is why the campaign we are launching today aims, *first* of all, to inform. 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.

It also shows that consumer associations have a crucial role to play in building consumer confidence. Everywhere in the EU, and in Malta as well, consumer associations are the most trusted source, for information and advice.

And, in Malta, as in most other new Member States, consumer associations are in need of support, from governments and consumers themselves, to build up their organisational capacity to fulfil these expectations.

The *second* aim of this campaign is therefore to promote the new Consumer Centre on South Street. I am very grateful to Minister Galea and the Maltese government for the excellent effort made to set up this Centre.

There consumers will find information about their rights, and guidance on how to obtain redress, both at home and abroad, across the EU.

The new location will bring together the Maltese Centre of the EU-wide network of experts in cross-border shopping - under the direction of Mr Claude Sammut; and the experience of the Consumer Association of Malta, as represented here by its president Manuel Farugia.

Our commitment is to help, together with the Maltese government, build up the expertise of this Centre over the coming years. Their 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.

Our *third* and final objective in the campaign over the next 9 months, is to work with the Maltese business community. Because companies, large and small, also have a need to know consumer rights.

I would also like to convince Maltese businessmen that to be 'consumer friendly', that adhering to best practice, - even beyond legal obligations - ,is not a cost, but a competitive advantage in the open and free markets of today.

So, to conclude, to make consumer rights work for Maltese people, we need to know more about their rights, and need to know how to use them.

Authorities, businesses and the Consumer Association, as well as consumers themselves, we all have a role to play in creating a positive consumer culture; in furthering a constructive dialogue to take consumer protection and consumer rights another step forwards.

I hope this campaign will contribute to that, and I look forward to great results

Grazzi hafna (thank you very much in Maltese)