

Single Market rights: Problem-solving action

In the fifth year of its existence the SOLVIT problem-solving network operated jointly by the Commission with Member States has seen a further growth in its case volume and success rate. The free-of-charge service seeks to find solutions to problems related to Single Market rights within 10 weeks using a pan-European network of experts.

In 2007, the EU's SOLVIT network handled 819 problems encountered by citizens and businesses in exercising their Single Market rights, of which 679 (83%) were solved.

In the fifth year of its existence, SOLVIT saw a growth in case volume of 75% compared with 2006 and managed to keep resolution rates high and case handling times short.

These figures are set out in the European Commission's annual SOLVIT report, which concludes that 2007 has been an

other successful year for SOLVIT. But the report also notes that staffing problems persist in several national SOLVIT centres as several Member States are still not providing adequate resources to SOLVIT centres to allow them to engage in awareness-raising activities.

Main conclusions

Bulgaria and Romania joined the SOLVIT network in January 2007 resulting in a 15% increase in case submissions. Both countries have set up SOLVIT centres with a good problem-solving capacity.

Since 2002 SOLVIT has dealt with more than 2,300 cases relating to areas such as residence permits, recognition of professional qualifications, employment and social security rights, market access for products, provision of services, VAT reimbursements or border controls for businesses.

In July 2007 SOLVIT celebrated its 5th anniversary with events in Brussels and in the Member States. The intensification of awareness-raising activities and the introduction of a web complaint form in December 2005 were at the basis of the significant increase in the number of cases handled. However, within the overall SOLVIT case flow the number of complaints submitted by citizens doubled while complaints submitted by businesses remained at the same level as in 2006. The report points out that less than 20% of SOLVIT cases were submitted by businesses, which demonstrates a need to intensify information activities for this target group.

The SOLVIT approach also received strong support from the European Parlia-



The SOLVIT network - experts in every capital

SOLVIT helps Luxembourg architect to work in France

An architect from Luxembourg applying to become a member of a regional order of architects in France was refused because the insurance company covering his professional liability risks was not registered in France.

SOLVIT intervened to enable the architect to register with the French order and exercise his profession in France. Solved within 13 weeks.

Italian company helped to establish in Germany

An Italian entrepreneur wished to establish his company in Germany but was refused because his documents were not in the same format as the relevant European forms.

SOLVIT Italy intervened to clarify what were the requirements from the German authorities, which resulted in the issuing of the correct documents by the Italian authorities. Solved within 8 weeks.

Finnish vitamins allowed into the Czech Republic

A Finnish company applied for permission to launch dietary supplements in the Czech Republic. The Czech authorities claimed the products exceeded the limits for vitamin B and could be harmful for the consumers if marketed as dietary supplements. SOLVIT intervened to convince the authorities that the products were not pharmaceuticals and could be marketed as food supplements, if correctly labelled. Solved within 5 weeks.

ment in 2007 which resulted in a budget increase to permit further development and promotion. Several members of the European Parliament have also become more engaged in promoting SOLVIT in the course of their daily activities.

SOLVIT has continued to deliver a high-quality service and continues to generate numerous success stories. However, as in the previous year, the report urges national authorities to adequately staff their SOLVIT centres.

Without adequate staff levels, it will not be possible to meet the agreed quality standards in all SOLVIT centres, to deliver solutions within the 10 weeks deadline and to engage in promotion activities, the report cautions.



pragmatic solutions to complainants within an average period of ten weeks.

SOLVIT is a free-of-charge, easy-to-use service. Individuals can submit their complaints via a webform in their native language or contact their national SOLVIT centre. It is part of a group of services designed to help citizens and businesses make the most of their EU rights, including Europe Direct, the information portal Your Europe and the Citizens Signpost Service which provides personalised legal advice.

"SOLVIT has proved its worth not only as a successful problem solving tool, but also as a model for administrative co-operation between Member States," commented Internal Market and Services Commissioner Charlie McCreevy.

"It shows that it is possible, even within a complex multicultural organisation like the European Union, to shift from formal, time consuming procedures to an informal, pragmatic and fast track approach.

"More and more Europeans are turning to SOLVIT when they encounter obsta-

SOLVIT 2007 facts and figures

- The overall number of cases handled increased by 75%. 819 cases were considered suitable to be handled in SOLVIT representing around 20% of all queries received. The remainder was referred to other instances or networks.
- The average resolution rate for SOLVIT cases was 83 %.
- Of all resolved cases, 77% were resolved within the deadline of ten weeks. Case handling time was maintained at an average of 58 days.
- 82% of SOLVIT cases were submitted by citizens. The major problem areas for citizens were social security (32%), recognition of professional qualifications (24%) and residence rights, especially for third country spouses of EU citizens (18%).
- 18% of SOLVIT cases were submitted by businesses. Their main problem areas are taxation (30%), market access for products (20%) and the provision of services and establishment (20%).

cles in the Single Market. With its fast and effective service, SOLVIT offers them a personal and friendly helping hand."

Practical solutions

The Commission and EU Member States set up the SOLVIT network in 2002 to help solve practical problems in the Single Market. Since then it has since dealt with more than 2,300 cases relating to areas as varied as residence permits, recognition of professional qualifications, employment and social security rights, market access for products, provision of services, VAT reimbursements or border controls for businesses. SOLVIT delivers

info

<http://ec.europa.eu/solvit>

Portuguese citizen succeeds with Italian pension

An 82-year-old Portuguese citizen received a pension from the Italian system. Italian authorities requested her to send a 'proof of life' which she did by registered mail immediately after receiving the request. However, at the same time, the Italian authorities stopped payment of her pension. SOLVIT intervened to clarify the situation and was able to arrange rapid payment of the amount due. Solved within two weeks.

Latvian nurse allowed to work in Malta

A Latvian nurse had moved to Malta after marrying a Maltese national. Her diploma as a registered nurse was not recognised as valid for work, due to alleged discrepancies in her certificate and period of employment. SOLVIT Malta intervened to clarify that the Latvian diploma should be recognised under EU rules, allowing her to be issued with the necessary nursing certificate required for her job in Malta. Solved within 10 weeks.

SOLVIT facilitates German car registration in Slovakia

A Slovakian citizen contacted SOLVIT because his German car was refused registration in Slovakia because it allegedly did not meet Slovak requirements in respect to noise, pollution and brakes. The authorised importer confirmed that the car fulfilled all conditions laid down by the EC. SOLVIT intervened to convince the Slovakian authority that it was acting contrary to EU law. The car's registration was finally accepted within 3 weeks.