

SOLVIT

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The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Cristian Silviu BUSOI (ALDE, RO) on SOLVIT.

It welcomes the Commission's initiative of July 2002 to establish the SOLVIT network of national administrations using an online inter-active database, which has been a successful tool which has enhanced transparency and created peer pressure to speed up problem resolution. The Commission is called upon to use all its powers to ensure effective application of internal market rules in order to reduce the administrative burden on citizens and businesses.

Effective problem solving in the internal market: Members stress that problems relating to the implementation of internal market rules are often detected through the SOLVIT network and that SOLVIT experience should be fed into national and EU policy-making. They call for the following:

- inclusion in the Internal Market and Consumer Market Scoreboards of more detailed information on the application and enforcement of internal market legislation, both with a view to increasing transparency and as a useful tool for SOLVIT staff;
- the Internal Market Scoreboard, the SOLVIT Report, the Citizens Signpost Service and the Consumer Market Scoreboard to be published at the same time once a year in order to provide a global picture of the development of the internal market;
- the Consumer Market Scoreboard should include a detailed account of the progress, achievements and shortcomings of SOLVIT;
- immediate action to deal with shortcomings of SOLVIT.

Horizontal problems identified at national level: the committee commends the work done by SOLVIT, in particular its case resolution rate, which has remained high (83%) even though its workload increased in 2008 (rising by 22% to 1000 cases) and despite the fact that some SOLVIT centres are faced with staffing problems. Member States are asked to ensure that their SOLVIT centre has strong political support so that it can persuade the authorities about whom complaints are made to cooperate actively within the SOLVIT procedure and within the relevant deadlines.

Measures to be envisaged: the committee calls on the Commission and Member States as appropriate, to do the following;

- promote SOLVIT, using all forms of media to ensure a wide outreach to citizens and businesses, especially about how to assert their rights, and to allocate sufficient resources to make this promotion more effective;
- promote online alternative dispute settlement systems within the SOLVIT network;
- promote SOLVIT as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism, by means of national information campaigns;
- set up web pages linked to the European SOLVIT portal, featuring a compilation of successful cases and of best practice with regard to settling disputes by means of this mechanism;
- increase the efficiency of SOLVIT centres by providing civil servants from within the relevant departments in order to facilitate the resolution of cases which are outside the remit of SOLVIT (SOLVIT+), as well as by ensuring proper access to legal expertise for SOLVIT centres within their administration;
- appoint a SOLVIT liaison officer in public services involved in implementing internal market rules, with a view to ensuring better cooperation;
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organise information campaigns on SOLVIT at local, regional or national level, targeting specific groups, such as SMEs, which currently lag behind in terms of awareness of SOLVIT, and exchange best practices so that SOLVIT is promoted as efficiently as possible;

- increase the staffing of SOLVIT centres, using all available means, including alternative financing arrangements;
- analyse the causes of the low success rates of certain SOLVIT centres, as well as the causes of their relatively long case-handling times, in order to provide useful information for the design of a better problem-solving strategy, to the benefit of citizens and businesses in the internal market;

In particular, the Commission is also invited to:

- submit SOLVIT annual reports containing much more detailed information and statistical data, which would also allow the effectiveness of each national centre to be assessed, since it is otherwise difficult to make long-term assessments of trends and propose specific targeted measures to improve the situation in individual Member States;
- create a single web portal for all SOLVIT centres at an address that is as easy to find as possible (www.solvit.eu). Members are of the opinion, at the same time, that a marked improvement in the visibility of the SOLVIT network on the Internet is essential and that for this purpose use must be made of both social networking sites and search engines;
- finalise the Single Market Assistance Services project for streamlining information, advice and problem-solving assistance services to make them more accessible and more effective;
- initiate an accelerated Treaty infringement procedure if an unresolved SOLVIT complaint reveals a prima facie breach of Community law.

The committee requests SOLVIT to:

- refer cases of misapplication of EU legislation which are too complex for it to resolve not only to the Commission but also, where appropriate, to Parliament's Committee on Petitions;
- include on its website a link to Parliament's Committee on Petitions as well as to the relevant committees of the national parliaments, so that citizens may be made aware of their right to petition Parliament as a means of obtaining non-judicial remedies and solutions through the political and legislative process.

Lastly, the committee calls on the European Ombudsman to cooperate more closely with the SOLVIT centres and to forward all incoming complaints for which he is not competent to the SOLVIT centre presumed to be competent where those complaints relate to the internal market and could come within the scope of SOLVIT.