

SOLVIT: Single Market problem-solving network sees 75% growth in case volume in 2007

A Spanish student wanted to start her university studies in Belgium, but was refused because the original certified diploma of her secondary education had not been issued yet by the Spanish authorities. SOLVIT persuaded the university to accept other evidence so that she would not miss an entire academic year. A British manufacturer of marine radio equipment was asked by the German authorities to retest its products in Germany even though they had already been tested and placed on the market in other EU Member States. SOLVIT intervened to ensure that the products could be sold in Germany without costly retesting. These are only two examples of the hundreds of problems that SOLVIT managed to solve for citizens and businesses in 2007. Last year, 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 another successful year for SOLVIT, but also, notes that staffing problems persist in several national SOLVIT centres. Several Member States are still not providing adequate resources to SOLVIT centres to allow them to engage in awareness-raising activities.

Internal Market and Services Commissioner Charlie McCreevy said: "SOLVIT has proved its worth not only as a successful problem solving tool, but also as a model for administrative cooperation between Member States. 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 obstacles in the Single Market. With its fast and effective service, SOLVIT offers them a personal and friendly helping hand."

Main conclusions of the 2007 SOLVIT report

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

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. Less than 20% of SOLVIT cases were submitted by businesses, which demonstrates a need to intensify information activities for this target group.

SOLVIT also received strong support from the European Parliament in 2007 which crystallized in the creation of a new budget line for further development and promotion of SOLVIT. Furthermore, several members of the European Parliament have become more engaged in promoting SOLVIT in the course of their daily activities.

SOLVIT continued to deliver a high-quality service and numerous success stories. However, like last year the report urges national authorities to adequately staff their SOLVIT centres. Without sufficient staff, 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.

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%).

About SOLVIT

The Commission and Member States set up the SOLVIT network in 2002 to help solve practical problems in the Single Market. SOLVIT has since dealt with more than 2,300 cases relating to a variety of 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. SOLVIT delivers pragmatic solutions to complainants within an average period of ten weeks. SOLVIT is a free-of-charge, easy-to-use service. Complainants can submit their complaints via a webform in their native language or contact their national SOLVIT centre.

SOLVIT 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 (<http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope>) and the Citizens Signpost Service (<http://ec.europa.eu/citizensrights>) which provides personalised legal advice.

The 2007 report is available at the SOLVIT website: <http://ec.europa.eu/solvit>

SELECTION OF SOLVIT SUCCESS STORIES IN 2007

FREE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS

UNITED KINGDOM - PORTUGAL



SOLVIT helps British newlyweds to put icing on the cake

A British couple officially married in the United Kingdom invited their friends and relatives to join them for their wedding celebrations in Portugal. The bride's father, an Iranian national married to a British citizen for over 25 years, and living and working in the UK, applied for a two-week visa to Portugal. He provided all necessary documents, but the visa was nonetheless refused for 'Immigration issues.' The groom contacted SOLVIT, which worked with the relevant authorities to grant the bride's father a visa in time for the celebrations in Portugal. The groom exclaimed in gratitude, "This good news has come as

such a relief and I am happy to say that my wedding celebration will now be a time of happiness." **Solved within two weeks.**

AUSTRIA - LITHUANIA

SOLVIT facilitates Austrian visa for Russian mother of a Lithuanian citizen

A Lithuanian national and her Russian mother, both legally resident in Lithuania, wished to travel to Austria together. The Austrian Embassy in Vilnius requested the mother to submit a visa application and various additional documents concerning her place of residence in Austria, an invitation to Austria, financial documents, health insurance and more. SOLVIT Austria requested an accelerated procedure, which was granted after certain conditions regarding the process had been clarified between both parties. **Solved within three weeks.**

SOCIAL SECURITY

PORTUGAL - ITALY

SOLVIT helps Portuguese citizen to obtain her Italian pension

A 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. This put her in a very difficult situation since this pension was her only means of subsistence. SOLVIT intervened to clarify the situation and was able to arrange rapid payment of the amount due. **Solved within two weeks.**

PORTUGAL - GREECE

SOLVIT defends rights of Portuguese researcher in Greece

A Portuguese chemical researcher was working on a doctoral thesis at a university in Greece. Since she was eligible for benefits under the university's health insurance scheme, she applied for an exemption from the national social security system. However, the Greek authorities refused to grant such an exemption because she was Portuguese. SOLVIT advanced the non-discrimination principle and managed to convince the Greek authorities to reconsider their decision and agree to the requested exemption. **Solved within one week.**

RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

LATVIAN - MALTA

SOLVIT helps Latvian nurse 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.**

FREEDOM TO PROVIDE SERVICES

GERMAN - ITALY



SOLVIT lets tourists charter German yachts in Italy

A German enterprise chartered four yachts under German flag to tourists in Italy. The business-owner was fined for not having registered its commercial yachts with local port authorities in accordance with recent Italian regulations. Five months later, after repeated efforts to obtain registration, the business-owner was told that registration would only be possible if the business was established in Italy. SOLVIT stepped in to make it clear that this condition was not in line with EU law and that the

authorities should accept the registration in the German Chamber of Commerce. All four yachts were registered and charter licences were issued. **Solved within 9 weeks.**

LUXEMBOURG - FRANCE

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. The order insisted that the architect should take out French insurance. SOLVIT made it clear that this condition was not in line with EU law, as the architect's Luxembourg insurance company was duly registered with the Luxembourg authorities. This enabled the architect to register with the French order and exercise his profession in France. **Solved within 13 weeks.**

FREEDOM OF ESTABLISHMENT

ITALY - GERMANY

SOLVIT helps Italian company to establish in Germany

An Italian entrepreneur wished to establish his company in Germany and submitted the necessary documents. However, German authorities refused the documents because they were not in the same format as the relevant European forms. After several fruitless attempts to obtain the documents in the requested form, the businessman turned to SOLVIT for help. SOLVIT Italy was able to intervene 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.**

MARKET ACCESS FOR PRODUCTS

ROMANIA - SLOVAKIA



SOLVIT releases Romanian washbasins for the Slovak market

A Czech company distributes construction products in Slovakia, including washbasins from Romania. The products were imported into the Czech Republic and tested by an authorised Czech body. However, the Slovak authorities ordered the products to be withdrawn from the market unless the company submitted a certificate of conformity issued by the Romanian producer. SOLVIT convinced the authorities that the Czech certificate of conformity would be sufficient for

selling the washbasins in Slovakia. The products were released for sale immediately. **Solved within one week.**

UNITED KINGDOM - FRANCE

SOLVIT "tips the scales" for UK company in France

A British company manufacturing medical scales wished to expand its market in France. The company was already marketing its product in the United Kingdom and a number of other EU countries, and thus conformed to EU rules. However, the French authorities refused to accept the product on their market and requested additional testing. For over a year, the company tried to have their product accepted and in the end asked SOLVIT for help. The company and SOLVIT worked closely together to successfully market the product in France in a matter of weeks. According to the company, SOLVIT helped them avert a considerable loss. **Solved within 11 weeks.**



FINLAND – CZECH REPUBLIC

SOLVIT clears the way for Finnish vitamins in the Czech Republic

A Finnish company applied for permission to launch dietary supplements on the market in the Czech Republic. The Czech authorities claimed that under national legislation the products exceeded the limits for vitamin B and could be harmful for the consumers if marketed as dietary supplements. Even after a year of discussions, the authorities still considered the imported products as pharmaceuticals. SOLVIT managed to convince the authorities that the products were not pharmaceuticals and could be marketed as food supplements, if correctly labelled. **Solved within 5 weeks.**

UNITED KINGDOM - GERMANY

Marketing obstacles removed for marine communication products in Germany

A UK company which manufactured marine communication products launched a new VHF product used on board non-SOLAS vessels. Although the product was fully in compliance with EU law on radio equipment, the German licensing authorities told the company that customers would not be granted radio station licences to use the product unless it was approved by the competent authority. This re-testing meant that the company had to use additional resources and increased the burden on business. Due to SOLVIT's efforts, the German authorities changed the regulation on the re-testing of such product types and accepted that the principle of mutual recognition took precedence. **Solved within 9 weeks.**

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

SPAIN - BELGIUM



SOLVIT helps Spanish student to start her studies in Belgium

A Spanish student wanted to start her university studies in Belgium. However, she could not present an original copy of her secondary education diploma because it had not yet been issued by the Spanish authorities. The Belgian university refused to accept a provisional certificate from the Spanish ministry and insisted on the presentation of the original diploma by December. This meant that the student would miss an entire academic year if the diploma did not arrive in time and so she turned to SOLVIT for help. SOLVIT's intervention resulted in a closer examination of existing rules, which granted additional deadlines in such cases. In

the event, the student was granted an extension until May of the following year, renewable for a further year. **Solved within 2 weeks.**

ITALY – NETHERLANDS

SOLVIT helps Albanian partner of Italian national to study in the Netherlands

The Albanian partner of an Italian working in the Netherlands wanted to study at a public university. The university asked for payment of the non-EU residents' tuition fee, which is about three times more than the regular fee. After SOLVIT contacted the Ministry of Education, which then contacted the university, the university changed its position and asked the Albanian woman to pay the standard tuition fee. **Solved within 7 weeks.**

ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

ROMANIA - SPAIN

SOLVIT helps Romanian citizen to obtain EU work permit in Spain

A Romanian national who was a legal resident of Spain before Romania's accession to the EU contacted SOLVIT regarding his Romanian wife. She had also been a legal resident of Spain before Romania's accession, but did not possess a work permit. When she applied for an EU citizen's residence card with free access to the labour market, her application was denied for reasons unspecified. After SOLVIT's intervention, Spanish authorities acknowledged that their decision was not compatible with EU rules on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union. The applicant's spouse was invited to re-apply for the permit, this time with a positive outcome. **Solved within 3 weeks.**

BULGARIA - LUXEMBOURG

SOLVIT enables Bulgarian consultant to work in Luxembourg

A Bulgarian citizen with a French diploma was offered a job in a consultancy firm in Luxembourg. The company had made the necessary arrangements to obtain a work permit for its new employee. However, the procedure was taking much longer than the expected one to three months, jeopardising the Bulgarian citizen's chances of getting the job. Following SOLVIT's intervention, the applicant received his work permit and was able to start his



professional career in Luxembourg. **Solved within 8 weeks.**

CAR REGISTRATION

SLOVAKIA - SLOVAKIA

SOLVIT facilitates German car registration in Slovakia

A Slovakian citizen contacted SOLVIT because he could not get his German car registered in Slovakia. The Slovakian authority rejected the client's application because the car allegedly did not meet Slovak requirements in respect of noise and pollution levels, brakes and electromagnetic compatibility. However, the authorised importer confirmed that the client's car fulfilled all conditions laid down by the EC. SOLVIT confirmed that the Slovakian authority was acting contrary to EU law. After a further registration request, the client was eventually able to get his car registered. **Solved within 3 weeks.**

NETHERLANDS - PORTUGAL

Dutch car registered in Portugal

A Dutch national purchased a car in the Netherlands and then moved to Portugal, where she wanted to register her car. As the registration procedure was unusually lengthy and she was asked repeatedly for additional information, she contacted SOLVIT for help. SOLVIT discovered that the problem had to do with an exemption from car tax: according to Portuguese law, EU citizens are exempt from this tax under specific circumstances. Assessing whether she could be exempt took time, and she also had to present some vital additional documents, such as proof of residency and a statement on the CO2 emissions of her car. Once all the documents were approved, the car was able to be registered with full tax exemption. **Solved within 6 weeks.**

ROAD TRANSPORT

POLAND - SPAIN

Polish company receives reimbursement from Spanish authorities

While transporting goods from Spain to Ukraine, the driver of a lorry operated by a Polish transport company was stopped for a road inspection in Spain. Due to a discrepancy in the completion of the driver's record sheet, the road inspector confiscated the driver's documents and imposed a fine of EUR 3000, which was paid on the spot. Further proceedings fixed the final amount of the fine at EUR 2300. The Polish company had been waiting for their refund for seven months when they contacted SOLVIT. SOLVIT discovered that the authorities did not have the IBAN code of the Polish bank account, but had failed to request it from the company. The misunderstanding was cleared up and the money, including interest due to delay, was reimbursed. **Solved within one week.**

ESTONIA - POLAND

Estonian truck driver gets unjustified fine reimbursed in Poland

An Estonian truck driver was passing through Poland on his way back to Estonia. He was stopped by a Polish inspection officer and a fine was imposed because the papers he was carrying were in Estonian not in Polish. Since these papers are harmonised under EU law and have a common format for all EU Member States, insisting on a Polish version was contrary to EU rules. SOLVIT Poland convinced the inspection services that they had made a mistake and the fine was reimbursed. **Solved within 2 weeks.**

DISCRIMINATION

FRANCE - ROMANIA



SOLVIT ensures non-discriminatory entry fees to Romanian monasteries

A French citizen complained about discriminatory entry fees for tourists to Romanian monasteries. The ticket price for non-Romanians was twice that paid by Romanian citizens. As this policy was contrary to EU principles, the Romanian SOLVIT centre persuaded the church authorities to set non-discriminatory entry fees for the monasteries. **Solved within 9 weeks.**

NETHERLANDS - SPAIN

SOLVIT helps Dutch sailor to embark in Spain

A Dutch client lived in Spain and worked on a Spanish commercial vessel. The Spanish authorities refused to give her an international seafarers identity document (ISID), because she was not a Spanish national. The Dutch authorities did not issue an ISID because she did not work on a ship registered in the Netherlands. Without an ISID, sailors need to deal with piles of paperwork in order to embark on an international ship for work, which is often not possible because of short-term contracts. Taking a practical approach, SOLVIT Netherlands resolved the impasse, and persuaded the Dutch authorities to issue an ISID. **Solved within 7 weeks.**

DRIVING LICENCE

ROMANIA - SLOVAKIA

SOLVIT helps Slovenian citizen obtain a new driving licence in Spain.

A Slovenian citizen resident in Spain had had his driving licence stolen. This caused serious inconvenience since he needed to drive a car for professional reasons. Five months after he had applied for a new driving licence in Spain, he had still not received a reply. SOLVIT investigated the case and found that the hold-up was due to a language problem. The citizen was informed that he had to provide the police with a copy of the declaration of theft in order to obtain his new licence. Once the document was sent, he received a provisional driving licence, and shortly afterwards his permanent driving licence was sent to his home address. **Solved within 2 weeks.**