

SOLVIT: EU-wide problem-solving network continues to deliver fast and effective solutions but needs more national-level support

In 2006 the EU's SOLVIT network continued to provide citizens and businesses with fast and effective solutions to the concrete problems they experience when national administrations apply EU law incorrectly, but now requires more promotion and staff resources at national level in order to realise its full potential. This is the conclusion of the European Commission's annual SOLVIT performance report. The report also shows that while the annual number of cases handled remained stable, the case resolution rate remained high and average case handling speed increased significantly. In addition, involvement in SOLVIT is encouraging a growing number of Member States to be more proactive in bringing national rules into line with EU law.

Internal Market and Services Commissioner Charlie McCreevy said: "SOLVIT is an excellent example of the EU and its Member States delivering concrete results for citizens and businesses. It's a fast, free and informal approach that gets real problems solved in the Single Market. We now need to take SOLVIT to the next level so that more people can benefit from this innovative service."

Main conclusions

In 2006 the SOLVIT network has added many more success stories to its extensive catalogue of fast and pragmatic solutions that really help citizens and businesses to overcome the obstacles they may encounter when they want to work, live, or do business in another EU member state.

Furthermore, when solving a particular case, many SOLVIT centres voluntarily take the opportunity to ensure that the national legislation or guidelines concerned are adapted to comply with EU law, without the need for formal Commission intervention.

However, even more problems could be solved through SOLVIT. The report suggests that the stabilisation of the overall number of cases at 467 is due to a shortage of staff and promotional activities at national level, which is the case for almost half of the SOLVIT centres. For example, the four EU countries with the largest population sizes (Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy) submitted proportionately low numbers of cases. Three out of these four SOLVIT centres are understaffed.

Facts and figures

- After a steep increase of over 60% in 2005, the overall number of cases handled in 2006 remained stable, with 467 cases considered suitable for treatment.
- The average resolution rate for SOLVIT cases in 2006 was 82 %.
- Of all resolved cases, 73% were resolved within the deadline of ten weeks. Case handling time has decreased significantly from an average of 74 days in 2005 to 54 days in 2006.
- 69% of SOLVIT cases were submitted by citizens. The major problem areas for citizens were social security (23%), taxation (16%) and recognition of professional qualifications (15%).
- 31% of SOLVIT cases were submitted by businesses. Their main problem areas are market access for products (8%) and the provision of services and establishment (11%).

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 1,500 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 contact their national SOLVIT centre or fill in an online complaint form in the language of their choice.

SOLVIT is part of a "cascade" 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 2006 report is available at the SOLVIT website:
http://europa.eu.int/solvit/site/news/index_en.htm

Selection of SOLVIT success stories - 2006

Slovakia accepts Czech conformity certificate

A Czech company exported construction products to Slovakia. The products had been tested in the Czech Republic and the company obtained the necessary certificate of conformity in line with EU rules on construction products. However, the Slovak Trade Inspection informed the company that their products had to be tested again by a Slovak authority and bear the Slovak conformity marking. SOLVIT Slovakia explained to the Slovak authorities that the goods should be allowed on the Slovak market on the basis of the Czech marking only and made sure that previous instructions to the contrary were annulled. **Solved within 8 weeks.**



Flying the French flag in Portuguese waters

The French owner of a sailing yacht registered in France was asked by the Portuguese authorities in Porto de Sines to register his boat in Portugal because he had stayed in Portuguese ports for longer than six months. The yacht owner wanted to keep the French flag and turned to SOLVIT for help. SOLVIT Portugal contacted the maritime port authority to clarify the situation. It appeared that the six month limitation was not applicable to EU registered boats. This was explained to the local

port authorities so that the French sailor could keep his flag. **Solved within 2 weeks.**

23 May 2006 - British hairdresser can open a salon in Germany

A British hairdresser with more than 10 years of experience in running a salon in the United Kingdom wanted to open a similar business in Germany. The German Authorities rejected his application for a permit because his certificate of experience had not been issued by the right UK authority. SOLVIT Germany intervened to argue that the Chamber of Commerce had to accept the certificate in accordance with EU rules. As a result the hairdresser received his permit to start a business. **Solved within 1 week.**





Finnish dental practitioner can take up job in Spain thanks to SOLVIT

A Finnish citizen had applied for professional recognition as a dental practitioner in Spain. She did not receive a reply for many months and finally she contacted SOLVIT for help. SOLVIT Spain found out that there had been a misunderstanding about the procedure to be followed and they succeeded in speeding up the decision of the ministry so that the Finnish dental practitioner could start working in Spain. **Solved within 1 week.**

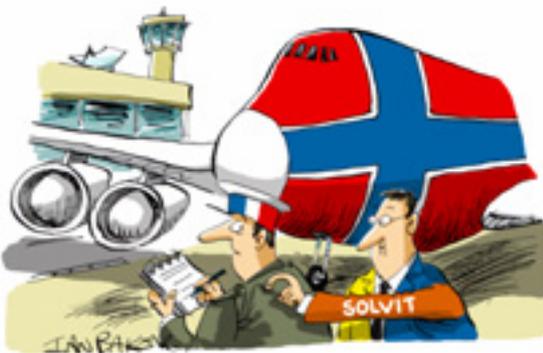
21 April 2006 – British anaesthetist gets recognition in Spain

A British anaesthetist applied for recognition of his qualifications in order to take up employment in Spain. While he was eligible for recognition in accordance with EU rules and had submitted the necessary declaration from the UK Specialist Training Authority, the Spanish authorities kept asking for more documentation. The doctor had already approached various other instances to help him resolve the bureaucratic deadlock. SOLVIT UK and SOLVIT Spain finally succeeded in cutting the red tape and the British doctor could start to work in Spain. **Solved within 8 weeks.**



Norwegian aviation company gets reimbursement of unjustified French fine

A Norwegian aviation company had one of its aircraft impounded at Le Bourget airport in France by French customs authorities and had to pay a fine of 3 000 EUR. The reason for the seizure of the aircraft was that the aviation company at the time had operated a commercial flight between two French airports without prior permission by the French authorities. However, under the EEA-Agreement which extends the Internal Market to cover the three EFTA states Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, the Norwegian aviation company did not need a special authorisation for this flight. SOLVIT



France intervened with the legal office of the French custom authority in order to inform them that the fine was in breach of EU rules. The authority then reimbursed the fine to the aviation company. **Solved within 11 weeks.**

SOLVIT fights against gender discrimination in the air

A Portuguese airline applied different criteria for the minimum height of male and female employees, namely 1.60m for women and 1.70m for men. A male applicant who already worked for another airline could not apply because of his 1.67m height. After the intervention of SOLVIT the rules concerning height were reconsidered and in the end changed to a common guideline, where the minimum height is now 1.60 for both men and women. **Solved within 9 months.** (SOLVIT + case involving changes in national guidelines)



SOLVIT gets Romanian bus driver back on track in Austria

A Spanish bus company maintains a regular passenger transport service between Spain and Romania for which it legally employs several Romanian drivers. During a border check of one of the busses at the Hungarian-Austrian border, the Austrian border police prevented the bus from transiting through Austria because the Romanian driver could not provide proof of residence in Spain. The driver was unrightfully issued a ban on driving busses in Austria for the next five years. Moreover, the bus was forced to detour through Slovenia, to the serious inconvenience of the passengers, drivers and the bus company. SOLVIT Spain submitted the case to SOLVIT Austria arguing that the Austrian police was not entitled to impose nationality or residence requirements, let alone prevent the bus from crossing Austria. SOLVIT Austria managed to convince the authorities that the police had made a serious mistake. Austrian authorities offered their apologies for the inconvenience caused, lifted the ban on the Romanian driver and clarified the situation to prevent similar mistakes from happening in the future. **Solved within 12 weeks.**



SOLVIT Italy helps Polish citizen to get her pension rights recognised

A Polish citizen worked in Italy for a year and applied for a supplement to her pension corresponding to the periods of her working activity in Italy. The authority sent the necessary forms and documents to their Italian counterpart but despite numerous reminders the procedures were not completed on the Italian side because the information system had not been adapted to EU enlargement. After the intervention of SOLVIT Italy, the national Italian authorities have updated the information system to ensure that citizens from the new EU member states can also enjoy their pension rights. **Solved within 8 weeks.**

