# Albanian Institutions on Consumer Protection According to the Law no. 9902, Dated 17.04.2008 "On Consumer Protection"

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n16p108

ISSN 2039-2117 (online)

ISSN 2039-9340 (print)

#### Abstract

The Stabilization and Association Agreement raised a lot of obligation for Albanian State. This act does not impose only the necessity of approximation of the legislation, but also the obligation to establish real and effective institutions. This article analyzes the institutions on consumer protection provided by law "On consumer protection". Only these authorities are in the focus of this article. It does analyze the other institutions that protect consumer, which are established or ruled under each law that offers protection to the consumers. The author offers a general view on the competences and the composition of them, ruled from this law and some others. Along the whole article, the authors give their conclusions and the recommendations on the role and the importance of these institutions in the field of consumer protection. The whole analyze of all the institutions that operate in the field of consumer protection will be part of another article.

Keywords: consumer protection, public institution, court, violate, rights.

#### 1. Introduction

Consumer protection is a matter of importance, which has raised lots of obligation for Albanian State, especially after the signing and entering into force to the Stabilization and Association Agreement. This act brought a new area in the field of consumer protection. The article 76 obliges the Albanian State to take all the measures and to have effective authorities in the field of consumer protection in order that the market functions properly<sup>1</sup>.

After that the Parliament approved a new law, in accordance to acquis communautaire. The law no. 9902, dated 17.04.2008 "On consumer protection" abolished the law no. 9135, dated 11.09.2003 "On consumer protection"<sup>2</sup>. This act in the sixth part of it, under the title "Subjects and state authorities responsible for consumer protection" mentions and rules some of public authorities in this field. We might clearly affirm that these institutions have been inactive and ineffective, because of them but also because of lack of information of consumer about their rights.

The law no. 9902, dated 17.04.2008 "On consumer protection" has very good provision on these institutions. Also

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¹ Article 76 provides: "The Parties shall cooperate in order to align the standards of consumer protection in Albania to those of the Community. Effective consumer protection is necessary in order to ensure that the market economy functions properly, and this protection will depend on the development of an administrative infrastructure in order to ensure market surveillance and law enforcement in this field. To that end, and in view of their common interests, the Parties shall encourage and ensure: — a policy of active consumer protection, in accordance with Community law; — the harmonization of legislation of consumer protection in Albania on that in force in the Community; — effective legal protection for consumers in order to improve the quality of consumer goods and maintain appropriate safety standards; — monitoring of rules by competent authorities and providing access to justice in case of disputes." The full text is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/albania/st08164.06\_en.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The first law "On consumer protection", in general, was approved in 1997, which is the law no.8192, dated 06.02.1997. This act gives general regulation on the field of consumer protection, without special provisions on the institutions which have competencies in the field of consumer protection. The articles 30 and 31 mention some specialized bodies which have administrative competencies. Consumers and consumer protection associations could address to these bodies when consumer's rights violation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> This law is amended from the law no. 10444, dated 14.07.2011 and the law no. 15/2013, dated 14.02.2013 "Some amendments on consumer protection law".

it has clarified their competencies in the field of consumer protection, giving to the public authorities administrative and "judiciary" competencies. This is the goal of this law. The article 1 provides: "The aim of this law is to protect the interests of consumers in the market, and establishing rules and establishment of relevant institutions to protect consumer rights". Also, these institutions are responsible for the development and implementing different policies to protect consumers, especially the vulnerable ones, such as: children, the elder and others with physic or mental problems.

The institutions established according to the law "On consumer protection" are:

- a) Administrative structure responsible for consumer protection;
- b) Consumer associations:
- c) Ombudsman:
- d) Arbitration court;
- e) Judiciary institutions;
- f) Any other structure, which offers alternative dispute resolution.<sup>4</sup>

For the purpose of these article, the authors have grouped these institutions:

- i) Public institutions, which have competencies in the field of consumer protections.

  Here, this group includes the Ministry responsible in this field, Coordination Council, The Inspectorate responsible for market surveillance<sup>5</sup>, Consumer Protection Commission and Ombudsman.
- ii) Judiciary institutions.
  - Here, this group includes arbitration court, administrative court and civil court.
- iii) Other bodies which offers protection to the consumers. Here, this group includes Consumer Associations and any other structure, which offers alternative dispute resolution.

The only restriction of this article is that is only based on the provisions of Consumer Protection law, analyzing only the institutions listed from this law. We should clearly state that the field of consumer protection is unlimited.

# 2. Public Institutions, which have Competencies in the Field of Consumer Protections

## 2.1 Ministry of economic development, trade and entrepreneurship

Consumer protection is a sensitive field, where the state should interfere through his power in order to protect consumer, in order to customize the information imbalance between consumer and the trader and to take public awareness for consumers. This duty derives also from the article 76 of Stabilization and Association Agreement. Because the state is an abstract concept, it realizes his obligations throughout his institutions, especially different ministries.

The Ministry of economic development, trade and entrepreneurship is the responsible ministry in the field of consumer protection. It should coordinate the work of intersectional policies and should prepare proposals for development of national policy on consumer protection and market surveillance. Also, I should take all the measures for an effective market surveillance in order to ensure compatibility for consumer products in accordance with legal requirements in this field, in order not to protect: the consumer's health, safety or other aspects of public interest<sup>6</sup>. Also specific provisions of the responsibility area of this Ministry in the field of consumer protection are provided in the law "On consumer protection:

Also, this Ministry has lots of competencies in the field of writing and drafting national strategies "On consumer

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Article 57, law no. 9902, dated 17.04.2008 "On consumer protection", amended.

The scope of application of this law includes goods and services, which are not ruled under a specific law, such as food products. These ones are regulated under the law no. 9863, dated 28.1.2008 "On food products". This act provides a specific public institution, such as: National Authority on food products. Also these public body is under the Ministry of agriculture, rural development and water management.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The law no. 15/2013, dated 14.02.2013 amended the law "On consumer protection", has named this institution from Administrative structure responsible for market surveillance to Inspectorate responsible for market surveillance. It is unclear why this law has named so this institutions, when in the other laws it is still Administrative structure responsible for market surveillance. This affirms clearly the incoherence between Albanian legislation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For further information concerning to the responsibilities of the Ministry of economic development, trade and entrepreneurship see: Decision of Council of Ministers, no. 835, dated 18.9.2013 "For determining the area responsibility of the ministry of economic development, trade and entrepreneurship", Official journal no. 158, dated 26.09.2013. The full text is available at: http://qbz.gov.al:81/botime/fletore\_zyrtare/2013/PDF-2013/158-2013.pdf

protection and market surveillance". The older strategy has no legal power, because it was available till 2013<sup>7</sup>. According to the older strategy the responsible Ministry should take all the measures in order to protect the economic interests of consumers and to protect them from risks and threats that they cannot deal individually.

Nowadays, the Ministry of economic development, trade and entrepreneurship is drafting and writing the national strategy on consumer protection and market surveillance, 2014 -2020, according to Consumer program 2014- 2020. The first draft of this strategy is focused not to consumer protection, but on empowering the consumers.

The strategy is not approved yet from the Council of Ministers and it is still a draft. The authors express their doubt about the success of this new strategy, the consumer's awareness and empowering them.

The European Commission, in its annual progress report of Albania, in chapter 28 affirmed that: "There has been some progress in the areas of consumer and health protection. However, implementation and enforcement of the legislation remain very weak. The market surveillance system is not yet in place. Low awareness in the health protection system, both amongst professionals and the public, is hampering transparency and enforcement"<sup>8</sup>.

Then, this Commission, in the Progress Report 2013, in chapter 28 clearly states that: "In the area of consumer protection, with regard to horizontal aspects, the 2013-20 consumer protection and market surveillance strategy is awaiting adoption. A gap analysis on the alignment of Albanian legislation with the acquis in the field of consumer protection was finalized, including components on health protection...

There has been some progress in the area of consumer and health protection. The establishment of a proper market surveillance system has been delayed... Overall, preparations are starting<sup>r9</sup>.

So, these two progress reports clearly states that the progress in the field of consumer protection is very slowly. The Albanian State, through the Ministry of economic development, trade and entrepreneurship should take more measures and actions.

### 2.2 Coordination Council<sup>10</sup>

Coordination Council is an administrative body, which consists of different subjects, such as representatives of public administration, which do not need to be directly related to the field of consumer protection, representatives of Consumer Associations and Business Organization. The Coordination Council reviews the policies and organizational measures on consumer protection. Before these measures are going to be approved this body gives its opinion, which should be reflected from the Consumer Protection Unit<sup>11</sup>.

# 2.3 Inspectorate responsible for market surveillance

This Inspectorate is ruled by the law no. 10 480, dated 17.11.2011 "On general safety on non-food products". According to the law "On consumer protection", this structure operates and controls the application of the articles 5, 7, 8 etc of this law 12. The Inspectorate acts together with the Consumer Protection Unit and reports to her.

This structure has to take measures to set limits for making product available in the market, to stop trading or to return the product when evidence that, despite such consistency, the product is still dangerous. It should inform the interested parties for the measures taken from it and gives to the interested parties (trader, producer or distributor) the opportunity to submit their written comments within 10 days prior to the adoption of these measures<sup>13</sup>.

The Inspectorate should collaborate with the trader, producer and distributor, form one side and consumer, form the other side, in order to return the unsafe products by consumers to the other party and if it is necessary to order the

<sup>&</sup>quot;The intersectional strategy on consumer protection and market surveillance, for period 2007-2013" is approved from the Decision of Council of Ministers no.797, dated 14.11.2007, Official journal no. 171, dated 19.12.2007. The full text is available at: http://www.kmk.al/pdffiles/Strategjia%20e%20Mbrojtjes%20se%20Konsumatorit%20se%20Qeverise%20Shqiptare%202007-2013.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> European Commission "Working document Albania 2012 progress report enlargement strategy and main challenges 2012-2013", Brussels, 10.10.2012, SWD (2012) 334 final, pg. 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> European Commission "Commission staff working document Albania 2013 progress report", Brussels, 16.10.2013,SWD(2013) 414 final, pg. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Article 50, law no. 9902, dated 17.04.2008 "On consumer protection".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Article 27,and 28 of the law. no 10 489, dated 15.12.2011 "On trade and market surveillance for non food products"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Even though both of laws have been changed, the law "On consumer protection" still refers to the law no. 9779, dated 16.07.2007 "On general safety, essential requirements and conformity assessment of non-food products", which has been abolished from the law no. 10 480, dated 17.11.2011 "On general safety on non-food products".

<sup>13</sup> Fur further information read the article 7 law No 10 489, dated 15.12.2011 "On trade and market surveillance on non food products".

destruction and disposal of such products in appropriate conditions.

The inspectorate has administrative, decision making and executive competencies, in order to protect consumer, especially from unsafe products.

#### 2.4 Consumer Protection Commission

This Commission was a necessity of time. The whole state does not have any specialized body, which could resolve the claims and the disputes of consumers. Consumer Protection Commission is composed of 5 members, 2 of them from the responsible unit on consumer protection and market surveillance, 2 of them from Ministry of Justice and 1 from civil society with economic or legal background. The position of the members and their competences are ruled form the law "On consumer protection", but also from the Decision of Council of Ministers<sup>14</sup>.

The Commission was established in the April of 2009<sup>15</sup> and till now has taken nearly 27 decisions<sup>16</sup>, most of them in the field of electricity sector and communication<sup>17</sup>. In these cases, the Commission observed the unfair contractual terms in consumer contracts<sup>18</sup>. In the case that the Commission finds a violation of the provisions of the Consumer Protection law, which make up administrative offenses, it imposes fines on the trader but also could order the trader to publish officially its decision<sup>19</sup>.

The Consumer Protection Commission has problems with the official website, which is not regularly updated. The European Commission has clearly underlined this, as a weak part of this important institution, in the field of consumer protection. Also, it goes on saying that: "The online complaint handling system has not generated effective complaints due to the poor information provided to users" 20.

The commission should take decision on the base of findings, requests, complaints or any other information provided that has to do with subjects are in its field of competence and also should take all the measures to enforce the law. But... in the case that the website does not work properly and due to the latest general election, the Commission is not composed yet, how is going to function?

#### 2.5 Ombudsman

The Albanian Constitution provides that: "The Ombudsman protects the rights, freedoms and legal interests of individuals against illegal or irregular actions or inactions of public administration"<sup>21</sup>.

According to the Constitution the consumers could submit their complaints to the Ombudsman if the public administration has adopted an illegal act, an irregular act or it should adopt and act ad it hasn't got it. The consumer could claim only in the case that this way of acting or enacting of the public institution has infringed his rights, freedoms or legal interests. These are cumulative conditions that the consumer should take into consideration.

It is unclear why the legislator has provided the Ombudsman as a structure where the consumers could complain, taking into consideration the legal effect of its acts. He could consider a consumer claim, only if in the trade position is a public institution or public entity. For example in the case of electricity sector or water sector, when the responsible public entity such as: Electricity Regulator Entity or Water Regulator Entity has not taken the appropriate measures to protect

<sup>16</sup> Only 16 of these decisions are reflected in the official website, the others could be found navigating in the internet.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Decision of Council of Ministers no. 1444. dated 22.10.2008.

<sup>15</sup> The official website: http://www.kmk.al/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Teliti, Ersida "Consumer contracts (Consumer credit and travel package contract)", Ph.D. thesis, Tirane, 2013, pg.57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Consumer Protection Commission, Decision no.04, dated 30.07.2010; Decision no. 08, dated 06.08.2010; Decision no. 23, dated 22.02.2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Article 55 and 57 of the law "On consumer Protection". The article 55 is formulated in accordance with the Directive 2009/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 "on injunctions for the protection of consumers' interests"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> European Commission "Commission staff working document Albania 2013 progress report", Brussels, 16.10.2013,SWD(2013) 414 final, pg. 53

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Albanian Constitution, article 60. Full text is available at: http://www.parlament.al/web/pub/kushtetuta\_perditesuar\_15171\_1.pdf. The term used from the Constitution "individuals" it goes in the right direction with the concept consumer, provided from the law "On consumer protection". Consumer means any natural person who buys or uses goods and services for individual purposes, which are outside his trade, business or profession. So, consumer is: Natural person; The buying or using purpose is not based in his trade, business or profession; Individual purpose. This definition is in fully compliance with the decision of European Court of Justice, in the join case C-541/99 and C-542/99, dated 22.01.2001 or in the case C-56/96 dated 17.03.1998 etc. For further information read: Teliti, Ersida cit. pg. 45-50.

consumer, the Ombudsman could exercise his powers. In this case, he could only give recommendations<sup>22</sup>.

Till now, no one of the consumers has submitted his complaints in this institution.

We should appreciate this provision of the legislator, where consumer could claim, even when the Consumer Protection Commission do not act or acts illegally.

As a conclusion, we strongly recommend to establish a new institution, the Consumer Ombudsman, who will arise the public awareness of consumer, protect their rights and resolve their problems against "the powerful" trader.

## 3. Judiciary Institutions

## 3.1 Civil Court<sup>23</sup>

"Everyone, in order to protect his rights, freedoms and his constitutional and legal interests... has the right to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial court established by law"<sup>24</sup>. This is known as the access to justice.

The consumer could claim to court anytime that the trader does not fulfill his obligations that arise from Civil Code, law "On consumer protection" or the contract.

Most of Albanian consumers do not claim to the court, because of the lack of confidence on it, because of the judiciary costs and the mentality. Some decisions of the first instance court that would have to do with consumers, should not take into consideration because the judge has not given his decision based on the provisions of Consumer Protection Law.

So.. does the Albanian lawyer have knowledge on this specific law?

The only decision in this field is the decision no. 7791, dated 23.07.2012 of the First Instance Court of Tirana<sup>25</sup>. The Appeal Court of Tirana has also affirmed the decision of the First Instance Court.

The state should give more importance on consumer education, a process that would start in the early learning.

#### 3.2 Administrative Court

The adoption of the new law on administrative court has established a new institution in the field of consumer protection<sup>26</sup>. Even though its scope of application is very narrow, the Administrative Court is an effort of Albanian State in field of guaranteeing the rights and freedom of its citizens. The article 7 lists all the cases that the administrative court has its jurisdiction. Referring to it, the consumer could claim there when:

- a) the dispute is based on an individual administrative act or regulations of public administration institution;
- b) disputes that arise due to illegal intervention or inaction of public administration institution etc...

So, consumer could claim there directly, when his rights are violated from a public institution, in the form of illegal intervention, because of the lack of action or based on an individual administrative act or regulation. In all this cases, an administrative public institution should be the subject that violates the consumer's rights.

In these cases, the competent administrative court is the court that operates in the territory, where the administrative public institution exercises his powers.

According to the article 15, the right to claim is known to anybody who pretends that his rights or legal interests are violated from an action or inaction of public body. Also, this right is kwon to any association or interest group that claims that legitimate public interest is violated. The legislator has been opened minded by knowing the right to claim not only to individual consumers, but also to their associations and in grouped consumers. In every time, that a group of consumers claims this represents a direct public interest, because it involves every natural person.

The only and the main restriction is that this violation must be caused by an administrative public institution.

<sup>2525</sup> This disagreement is between Esmeralda Elezaj versus Universiteti "Vitrina". Even that the claimant has based his claim on Consumer Protection law, the judge has justified his decision basing only on Civil Code.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Article 21 and 22 of the law no. 8454, dated 4.2.1999, amended from the law no.8600, dated 10.04.2000 and the law no.9398, dated 12.05.2005 "On Ombudsman".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> We will refer to Civil Court, to the Court of First Instance, the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court, excluding the Arbitration Court and Administrative Court.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Article 42/ parag.2 of the Constitution.

Besides this, we should encourage the judge for its decision, even though is so far from the European judges in consumer cases.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Law no. 49/2012, dated 03.05.2012 "On the organization and functioning of administrative courts and judgment of administrative disputes".

Besides this, the Administrative Court creates a lot of facilities in relation to the length of process, expenses and to the burden of proof.

As a conclusion, we could clearly affirm that the Administrative Court is another guarantee provided by state in the field of consumer protection.

## 3.3 The Arbitration Court

The arbitration court is regulated under Albanian Civil Procedure Code<sup>27</sup>. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice is preparing a draft "On arbitration". The aim was to approve a new law in accordance with international agreements. At this point, there are some arbiters who work in private way and they are organized in different manners, as Non-Profit Organizations or as a Centre.

How will consumer claim to the arbitration court?

The article 403 of Civil Procedure Code provides that: "It could be judged through arbitration procedure only if there is an agreement between parties, where they agree to resolve their disputes that have arisen or may arise from a contract concluded between them, through arbitration procedure." This article gives an undesired answer to our question, because this means that between the consumer and the trader should exist a contract and a special provision n it that in case of a disagreement, both parties will resolve it through arbitration. In the everyday life, most of contracts are not in written form. This limits the consumer right to use this institution provided by law. From another point of view, we could affirm that the arbitration procedure, based on its costs, could be more effective when the total value of the goods that the consumer has bought is high<sup>28</sup>, for example in the case of a credit consumer contract.

#### 4. Other Bodies which Offers Protection to the Consumers

Here, this group includes Consumer Associations and any other structure, which offers alternative dispute resolution.

#### 4.1 Consumer Associations<sup>29</sup>

Consumer associations are consumers unions that operate dependently from traders. The main purpose of their existence is protecting consumer rights. The Consumer Associations are regulated under the law no. 8788, dated 7.5.2001 "On Non-Profit Organizations" 30.

The article 54 lists all the rights of consumer associations in the field of consumer protection, which include: education, information, consumer complaints etc.

The Consumer Associations have the right to represent and to protect collective interest of consumer. In Albania there are known only two of these organizations: The Office on Consumer Protection and the Association for Consumers Protection. These organizations have not been effective in the field of consumer protection. They have not fulfilled their obligations rising from law and national strategy "On consumer protection and market surveillance, for period 2007-2013". Also, this act emphasizes the weak role and influence of these Consumer Associations, especially on food products, but not only.

Also this strategy pays a special attention to the role of them in the field of consumer education, formal or non-formal, public awareness and empowering the consumers against the traders.

The old strategy pays a special attention to the collaboration between the state, its structures and the consumer associations, including organizational and financial help. The importance of these associations is very high. The state has known the right to these consumer organizations to have their representative in different public institutions that have competences in the field of consumer protection, such as: Coordination Council<sup>31</sup>.

We strongly recommend a big collaboration between consumer associations and the state. Also, these structures should be more active in the field of consumer education and awareness.

<sup>29</sup> Article 53 and 54 of the law no. 9902, dated 17.04.2008 "On consumer protection", amended.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Arbitration is ruled from article 400 to 441 of the Civil Procedure Code. These articles will be in force until the moment that the parliament will adopt the new law "On arbitration".

Albania is part of the European Convention "On arbitration", which is approved by law no. 8687, dated 20.11.2000.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> In accordance with the concept of consumer.

<sup>30</sup> This law is amended by law no. 9814, dated 4.10.2007 "On some amendments on the law on non-profit organizations".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> For further information read: Decision of Council of Ministers no. 797, dated 14.11.2007, ibid.

# 4.2 Any other structure, which offers alternative dispute resolution

The law provides a new structure, which offers alternative dispute resolution in the field of consumer protection. The article 56, point 2 of the law "On consumer protection" imposes the Council of Ministers to determine the criteria that should have this structure.

The adoption of the law no. 10 385, dated 24.02.2011 "For mediation in dispute resolution"<sup>32</sup>. The article 3 of the Directive provides: "Mediation' means a structured process, however named or referred to, whereby two or more parties to a dispute attempt by themselves, on a voluntary basis, to reach an agreement on the settlement of their dispute with the assistance of a mediator". The law on mediation says that: "Mediation is extrajudicial activity, in which the parties seek a resolution dispute through a neutral third party (mediator) to reach an acceptable solution that it is not in contradiction with the law". The mediator could resolve civil matters and all the matters that the value of the claim does not exceed 500 000 All<sup>33</sup>.

The consumer disputes are included and should be resolve through mediation<sup>34</sup>. Besides the legal provisions the state should take all the appropriate measures to qualify the mediators in this field, especially in the consumer credit disputes<sup>35</sup> or in travel package disputes<sup>36</sup>.

In the end, we strongly recommend consumers to go to mediators, in order to resolve their disputes, because this process is too short, it is less expensive<sup>37</sup> and they are going to win.

## 5. Conclusions

- The law "On consumer protection" has listed the institutions, which could resolve their disputes:
  - a) Administrative structure responsible for consumer protection;
  - b) Consumer associations;
  - c) Ombudsman;
  - d) Arbitration court:
  - e) Judiciary institutions;
  - f) Any other structure, which offers alternative dispute resolution.
- The Ministry of economic development, trade and entrepreneurship is the responsible ministry in the field of consumer protection.
- The Coordination Council reviews the policies and organizational measures on consumer protection.
- The inspectorate responsible for market surveillance has administrative, decision making and executive competencies, in order to protect consumer, especially from unsafe products.
- The Consumer Protection Commission used to take decision on the base of findings, requests, complaints or
  any other information provided that has to do with subjects are in its purpose of application and also should
  take all the measures to enforce the law in the field of consumer protection.
- According to the Albanian Constitution the consumers could submit their complaints to the Ombudsman if the
  public administration has adopted an illegal act, an irregular act or it should adopt and act ad it hasn't got it.
- The consumer could claim to a Civil, Administrative or Arbitration Court anytime that the trader does not fulfill
  his obligations that arise from Civil Code, law "On consumer protection" or the contract.
- The Administrative Court is another guarantee provided by state in the field of consumer protection, whenever
  consumer rights are violated from a public institution, in the form of illegal intervention, because of the lack of
  action or based on an individual administrative act or regulation.
- Consumer associations are consumers unions that operate dependently from traders. The main purpose of their existence is protecting consumer rights.
- The Consumer Associations have the right to represent and to protect collective interest of consumer.

<sup>34</sup> Till now this structure hasn't been effective at all, because there are two National Chambers of Mediators. The lack of action from the Ministry of Justice has paralyzed this process.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> This law was adopted in full harmonization with the Directive 2008/52/EC of 21 May 2008 "On certain aspects of mediation in civil and commercial matters".

<sup>33</sup> Albanian money.

<sup>35</sup> Teliti, Ersida ibid. page 75.

<sup>36</sup> Teliti, Ersida ibid. page 204.

<sup>37</sup> Till now it has been free of charge.

• The consumer disputes are included and should be resolve through mediation.

## 6. Recommendations

- The new strategy "On consumer protection and market surveillance" is not approved yet from the Council of Ministers and it is still a draft. We recommend to adopt it as soon as possible an to be more effective.
- The Consumer Protection Commission has problems with the official website, which is not regularly updated.
- We strongly recommend to establish a new institution, the Consumer Ombudsman, who will arise the public awareness of consumer, protect their rights and resolve their problems against "the powerful" trader.
- The state should give more importance on consumer education, a process that would start in the early learning.
- The Consumer Associations should be more active in the field of consumer education and awareness.
- We strongly recommend a big collaboration between consumer associations and the state.
- The state should take all the appropriate measures to qualify the mediators in the field of consumer protection, especially in the consumer credit disputes or in travel package disputes.
- We strongly recommend consumers to go to mediators, in order to resolve their disputes, because this
  process is too short, it is less expensive and they are going to win.

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Civil Procedure Code

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Law no. 9863, dated 28.1.2008 "On food products"

Law no. 9902, dated 17.04.2008 "On consumer protection"

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