



# Association For Consumer Rights (Malta)

Pope Pius XII, Flat 4, Mountbatten Street, Blata I-Bajda  
Hamrun HMR 1579, Malta  
Tel no 356 21246982  
Email: [info@konsumatur.com](mailto:info@konsumatur.com)

## Conference on Food Safety – *educating the consumer*

A Conference on *Food safety – educating the consumer* was organised by the Association for Consumer Rights, Malta (ACR) in collaboration with the Embassy for Ireland to Malta on Saturday 18 May at Europa House, Valletta. The Conference was addressed by Hon Helena Dalli, Minister responsible for Consumer Affairs, European and local experts in food safety together with the contribution of the audience

Chair Grace Attard, ACR, General Secretary spoke about the importance of education and empowerment of consumers in matters concerning food safety. In Europe, and not least in Malta, the importance of building consumer confidence and protection is on the increase.

The need for Government and the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) to increase joint efforts in consumer education and protection was raised in the opening remarks of Stefan Xuereb, ACR President. NGOs working in the field of consumer protection need support to build a strong capacity to offer better services to citizens.

In a specifically prepared video message, EU Commissioner Borg responsible for Health and Consumer Affairs gave an overview of the important initiatives aimed at improving the health, safety and confidence of EU citizens. As policymakers giving a greater sense of empowerment to consumers would be the best system for food safety control.

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Hon Helena Dalli, addressed the conference and spoke about the European Year of Citizens 2013, which includes also consumer rights on goods and services. The National Strategy for Consumer Education is to be launched very soon. It will highlight policies to provide access to information and education for vulnerable groups like young children, the elderly and persons with disability. IT literacy is necessary for better access to information on food products as well as financial literacy to be able to budget, save, compare prices and report infringement to competent authorities. The Minister also made reference to the recommendations of the ACR to the MCCAA Public Consultation on the *National Strategy for Consumer Education*

From the EU perspective, Frans Verstraete, Head of Sector “Contaminants and residues of veterinary drugs” DG Sanco EU Commission stated that the EU has developed a system of the most sophisticated and comprehensive standards of food safety in the world. He emphasised that one cannot take the different segments of the agro food chain in isolation; ‘The “farm to fork” approach, in food safety legislation covers all sectors of the food chain, from seeds and plants, to animal reproductive material, to feed production, primary production, food processing, storage, transport and retail sale’.

Mr Verstraete explained the Commission's public health priorities to promote healthier diets amongst EU citizens and the importance of nutrition programmes in schools including

nutrition standards for school meals and the restriction of adverts for children on foods containing salts and sugars. A new legislation on food labelling aiming to ensure mandatory efficient and effective labelling is due in November 2014.

The Irish Ambassador to Malta H.E. Jim Hennessy gave an overview of the Irish Presidency priorities, one of which is strong measures to address issues concerning food safety and the prevention of hazards. He also stated that in the next few years Malta will be entering a new golden age: the Valletta anniversary in 2016, the EU Presidency in 2017, for which the Maltese government is working within the trio presidency, and Valletta awarded the European City of Culture 2018.

Mr Raymond Ellard, Director Consumer Protection Division, Food Safety Authority, Ireland, stated that consumers' interests and consumer confidence were important for business and citizens alike. Today's strong global market advertising and global food brands can make it confusing for individuals to realistically make informed choices. He referred to the horse meat fraud which was found by a random sampling on meat as part of an EU programme of checking label information. Price pressure makes rogues change the type of meat, especially as beef is three times more expensive than horse meat. Luckily no toxic drugs, like phenylbutazone given as injections to horses, was found in the horse meat.

During the second session Flavia Zammit, Senior Scientist, MCCA emphasized the need to ensure the authentic origin of food production. In her presentation, she dealt with what food labelling should really mean, the safety standards dealing with food contact materials and the true marketing of food supplements.

Doriette Agius and Charlene Vassallo, Senior Officers - Nutrition- Health Promotion Department, gave a very effective presentation on a national strategy on helping children and adolescents develop healthy eating habits for life. Following a study on eating habits among boys and girls between 9 and 15, both officers presented the findings making recommendations on healthy eating habits during different parts of the day, highlighting the importance of fruit and vegetables consumption and breast feeding up to the six month stage with breast feeding supplementing food thereafter. Malta needs to reduce the percentages of overweight and obesity, as recommended by 2020 BMI decreases and eating habits improve. This reduces the silent killers of high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes.

Mr Hadrian Bonello from the Environment Directorate spoke about the Food Safety Week Campaign 'The four Cs to food safety at home'. He highlighted healthy ways on: cleaning during food preparation; separating raw and cooked food to avoid cross contamination and keeping food covered in the fridge; cooking food to a safe temperature to kill micro organisms and when reheating; and fast proper chilling (refrigerating) down to the correct temperature ie under 5°C in the fridge or minus 18°C in the freezer and effective thawing .

An exchange of views from the floor raised concerns on products bought on the internet and the effectiveness of current protection measures at national level. Other issues concerned handling of food in food outlets and the authenticity of take away food, control of GMOs, food labelling and the need for more education, information and empowerment at all ages

Concluding, ACR President, Stefan Xuereb stated that the Association for Consumer Rights, Malta (ACR) is committed to increase its initiatives for the protection, education and empowerment of the Maltese citizens.

**For more information and application for membership, the ACR can be contacted on  
email: [info@konsumatur.com](mailto:info@konsumatur.com) or tel no: 21246982  
*Grace Attard, ACR General Secretary***