

Consumer association in Bulgaria – achievements and challenges

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Bulgarian National Consumers
Association

What is a consumer association?

- Why do we ask this question?
 - There is a significant lack of understanding among general public concerning: what is a consumer association
 - According to surveys, nearly half of the population in Bulgaria hardly distinguish between state authorities and consumer associations

Trust in consumer organizations

- The level of trust in consumer associations is lower in the new member states than in the old member states.
- According to latest EUROBAROMETER survey, only **22%** trust consumer organizations in Bulgaria (EU average – **65%**).

Legacy of the past

- Some of the main believes and prejudices that limit consumer associations' influence:
 - Average consumer expects protection instead of empowerment (knowledge and influence)
 - Assumption that somebody else should be responsible about their personal problems
 - Trust in market CONTROL instead of market FREEDOM (strict regulations instead of self regulations)
 - Consumer protection is only effective if provided by the state (through penalties)
 - Consumer protection must be free of any charges



Bulgarian National Consumers Association

- Established in 1998

The aims of the association are to protect consumers' interests by:

- **Providing information** that helps consumers be orientated in the market .
- **Assisting the consumers, when protecting their rights-** by consultation and legal advice for claiming in and out-of-court procedures /conciliation committees/.
- **improvement of consumer legislation** – representing consumers' interests in case of legislative changes.

- **Organizational structure of the association**

- Established **19 regional branches**
- Two thematic clubs:
 - **E-consumers Club** established in 1999, aiming at protecting consumers' interests using the global network for shopping.
 - **Young consumers club** established in 2002, where people under 30 years old are members to raise youth awareness on consumer issues.
- **Ten consumer contact points** in Sofia, Varna, Rousse, Bourgas, Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo, Smolian, Razgrad, Sliven and Blagoevgrad.

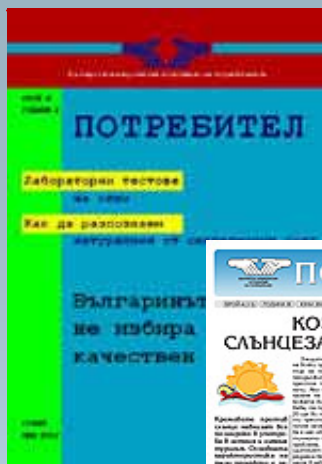


Bulgarian National Consumers Association

Activities:

- Publishes magazine - CONSUMER
- Fulfills comparative surveys and tests
- Provides consumer **consultations** over telephone, personal and in written.
- Periodically conducts **sociological surveys** among consumers.
- Carries on **lawsuits** for protecting the group interests of the consumers
- Participates at the drafting stage of different kinds of consumer related laws.

Main publications of BNCA



- **“Consumer”** – monthly newsletter 2002 – 2006
- Contains articles, tests and surveys and dangerous goods announcements

Main publications of BNCA



- **"CONSUMER"** – monthly magazine – since 2007

Main publications of BNCA



- ☉ Consumer guide for organic products 50 p., (2006)



- ☉ Educational guide for parents and teachers 48 p., (2006)



- ☉ Labeling of home devices 18 p., (2006)

Main publications of BNCA



- ☉ European Guide for Bulgarian Consumer
160 p., (2004)



- ☉ Guide for Bulgarian consumer 132 p.,
(2006)



- ☉ Collection of comments on the
application of the consumer legislation
106 p., (2006)

Main publications of BNCA



◀ **Europa
diary
2007/2008**



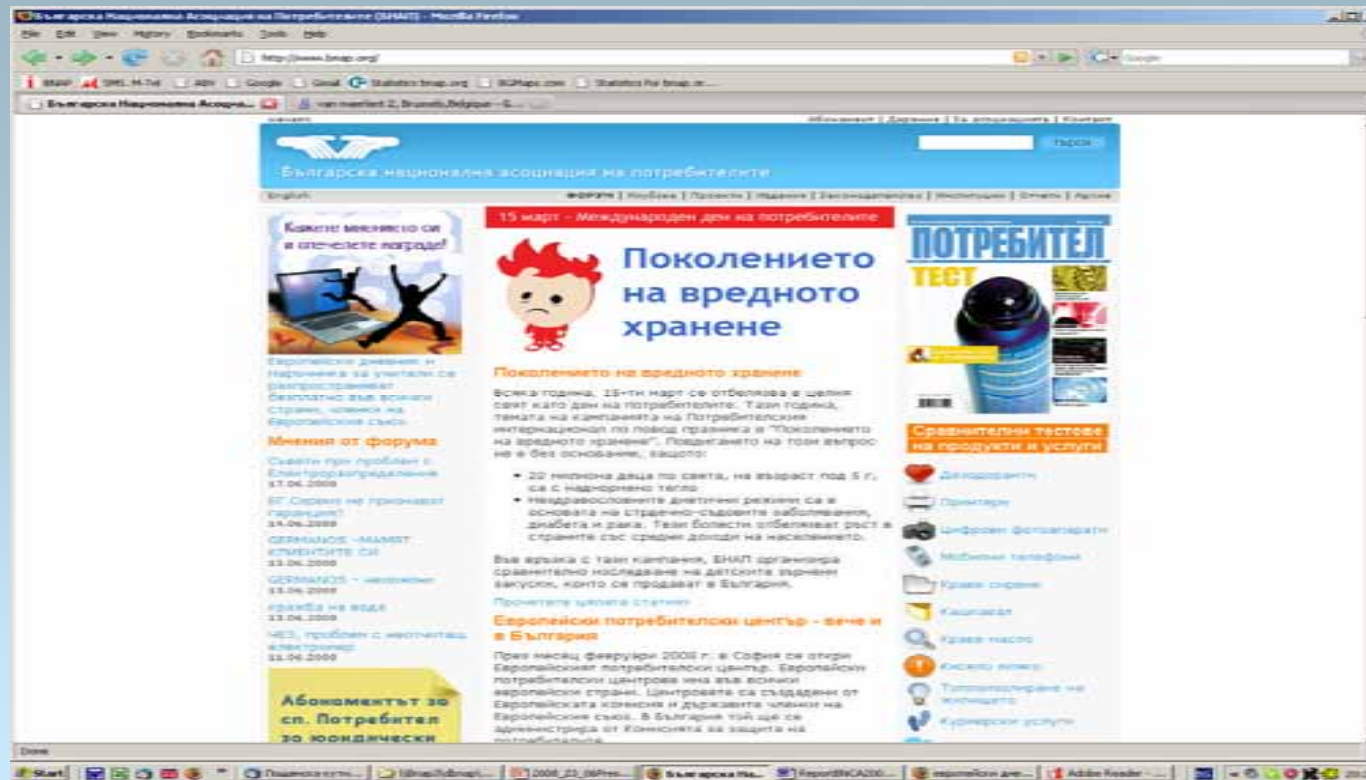
◀ **2008/2009**

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Bulgarian National Consumers Association

Website

□ <http://www.bnap.org>



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Bulgarian National Consumers Association

Sources of funding for the last three years

Source/Year	2005 in EUR	2005 in %	2006 in EUR	2006 in %	2007 in EUR	2007 in %
Members fees	2 188	2.89	2 300	2.8	1 279	3.79
Bulgarian government	4 406	5.83	4 090	4.98	5 624	16.67
Projects	68 887	91.26	75 313	91.75	24 849	73.64
Sales	0	0	382	0.47	1 994	5.91
Total	75 481	100	82 085	100	33 745	100

Sources of funding for the last three years by origin

Source/Year	2005 in EUR	2005 in %	2006 in EUR	2006 in %	2007 in EUR	2007 in %
Domestic (Members fees; Bulgarian government; Sales)	6 594	8.74	6 772	8.25	8 897	26.36
International (Projects – PHARE; Socrates; DG SANCO; Governments of Switzerland and Luxemburg; Consumers International; BEUC)	68 887	91.26	75 313	91.75	24 849	73.64
Total	75 481	100	82 085	100	33 745	100

BNCA's future challenges – political aspects

- ❑ To increase recognition and level of trust in consumer organizations
- ❑ To raise the importance of consumer policy
- ❑ To encourage and develop “consumer empowerment” instead of “consumer protection”

BNCA's future challenges – financial aspects

- Our organizations' future challenges
 - To increase domestic financial incomes – membership fees, sales and domestic projects (services)
 - Bring more cases to court and assist consumers to suit producers and claim compensation for damages
 - To carry out more comparative researches (tests) of products on the market – goods and services

Society challenges

- ❑ To **empower average consumer** – to raise personal understanding about consumer responsibilities and interests; to encourage lawsuits; to provide more information through public media
- ❑ Authorities must accept consumer associations as **allies, not competitors**.
- ❑ Better **involvement of consumer policy into other sector policies** (ex. energy, transport, tourism...)