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# 1. Consumer policy institutions

## 1.1. MINISTRY RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSUMER POLICY

The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania is responsible for development and implementation of consumer protection policy.

The Government of the Republic of Lithuania (the Council of Ministers) every four years approves the national strategy for the protection of consumer rights. The National Consumer Rights Protection Strategy 2007-2010 was approved in 2007. It sets out key aims and objectives for consumer rights protection, and provides the action plan for enforcement of the foreseen implementation measures.

Other ministries have responsibilities for specific areas of consumer protection: the Ministry of Agriculture – food safety, the Ministry of Economy – product safety and internal market issues, the Ministry of Education and Science – consumer education, etc.

### **Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania**

*Address:* Gedimino Ave. 30/1, LT-01104 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 5 266 2980

*Fax:* +370 5 262 5940, 262 4732

*E-mail:* [rastine@tm.lt](mailto:rastine@tm.lt); [tminfo@tm.lt](mailto:tminfo@tm.lt)

*Website:* [www.tm.lt](http://www.tm.lt)

## 1.2. PUBLIC AGENCIES

The State Consumer Rights Protection Authority (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Authority’) is established and operates under the Ministry of Justice. The Authority implements the national consumer protection policy and ensures protection of consumer rights. The main functions of the Authority are the following:

- coordinating of activities of consumer rights protection bodies responsible for the regulation of different areas of consumption, in the sphere of the protection of consumer rights;
- adoption and harmonisation of legal acts relating to the protection of consumer rights;
- investigation and consideration of consumer complaints in accordance with the out-of-court procedure of the settlement of consumer disputes;
- imposing sanctions provided for by law;
- control of fairness of consumer contracts standard terms.

### **The State Consumer Rights Protection Authority**

*Address:* Vilniaus str. 25, LT-01402 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 5 262 6751

*Fax:* +370 5 279 1466

*E-mail:* [tarnyba@vvtat.lt](mailto:tarnyba@vvtat.lt)

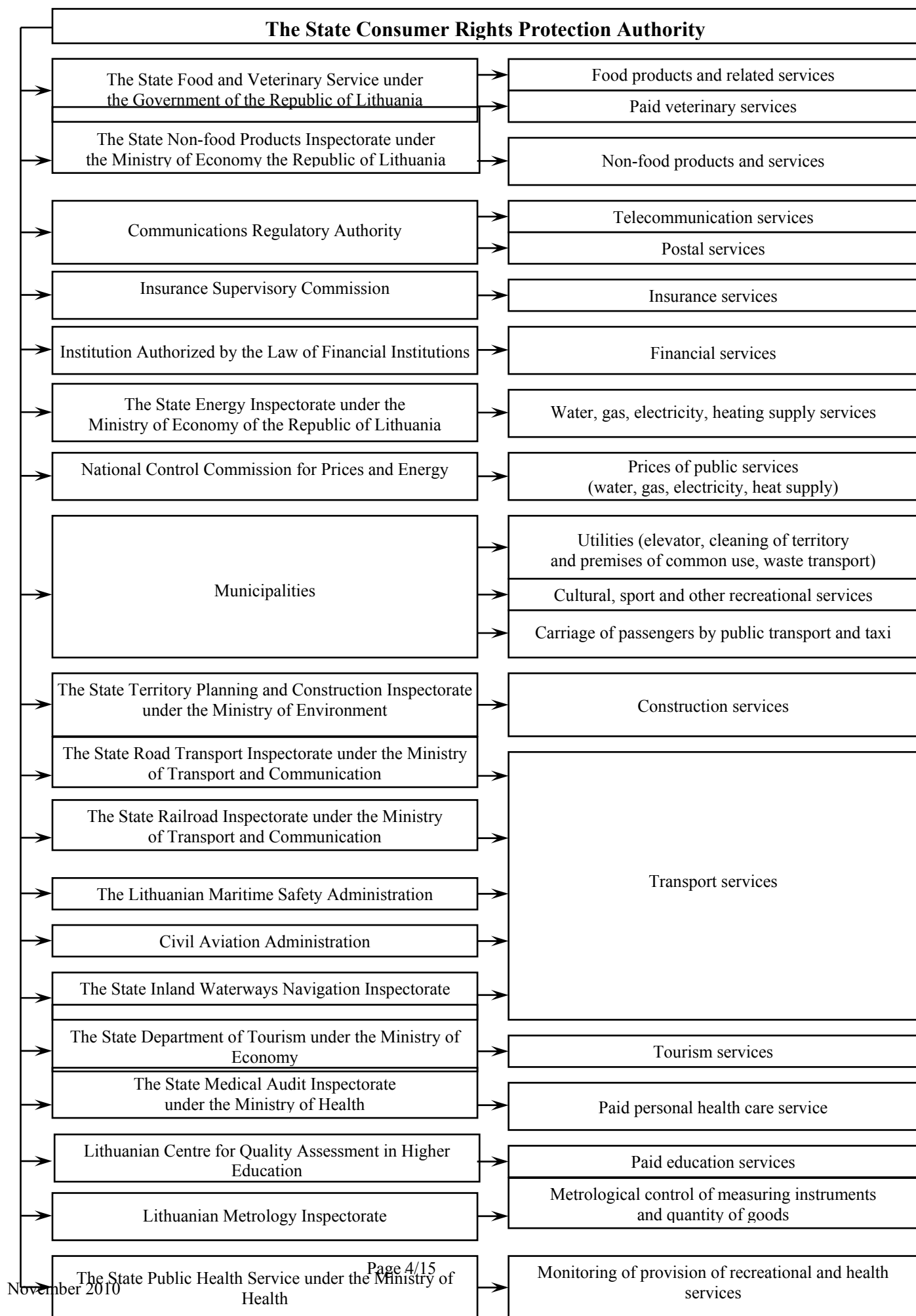
*Website:* [www.vvtat.lt](http://www.vvtat.lt)

There are 18 various institutions which protect consumer rights and interests in certain areas of consumption, i.e. the State Food and Veterinary Service under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, State Non-Food Products Inspectorate under the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Lithuania, Communications Regulatory Authority, Insurance Supervisory

Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, the State Tourism Department at the Ministry of Economy, the State Public Health Service under the Ministry of Health and other consumer protection agencies indicated in the legal acts.

Institutional framework of consumer protection in Lithuania at national level (see the scheme below):

## INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM OF CONSUMER RIGHTS PROTECTION



### 1.2.1. Competence of the National consumer protection authorities

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Sphere of consumer protection activities</b>
The State Food and Veterinary Service <a href="http://www.vet.lt">www.vet.lt</a>	Safety and quality of food products; food labelling.
The State Non-Food Products Inspectorate at the Ministry of Economy <a href="http://www.inspekcija.lt">www.inspekcija.lt</a>	Safety and quality of non-food products and services; labelling of non-food products; return and replacement of goods.
The State Energy Inspectorate <a href="http://www.vei.lt">www.vei.lt</a>	Control of energy facilities and energy (electricity, heat, fuel gas, bio fuel, oil and oil product) equipment; technical safety and operation of energy facilities and energy equipment and supply of energy as well as energy efficiency.
The Communications Regulatory Authority <a href="http://www.rrt.lt">www.rrt.lt</a>	Electronic communications, postal services.
The Civil Aviation Administration <a href="http://www.caa.lt">www.caa.lt</a>	Civil aviation services, compensation and assistance to passengers in cases of cancellation or long delays of flights.
The Insurance Supervisory Commission of the Republic of Lithuania <a href="http://www.dpk.lt">www.dpk.lt</a>	Insurance services; protection of interests and rights of insureds, insurers, beneficiaries or injured third parties.
The State Public Health Service under the Ministry of Health <a href="http://www.vvspt.lt">www.vvspt.lt</a>	Monitoring of services provided by hairdresser's shops, beauty salons, solariums, swimming pools, laundries, saunas, gyms, clubs, and accommodation services; national public safety control of health care institutions, educational establishments and social care and support bodies.
The State Medical Audit Inspectorate at the Ministry of Health <a href="http://www.vmai.w3.lt">www.vmai.w3.lt</a>	Personal health care services; national monitoring and expertise of accessibility, quality (relevance) and efficiency of personal health care service providers.
The National Control Commission for Prices and Energy <a href="http://www.regula.lt">www.regula.lt</a>	Prices of central heating and hot water, natural gas and electricity.
The State Inland Waterways Navigation Inspectorate <a href="http://www.vvli.lt">www.vvli.lt</a>	Safe navigation in inland waterways.
The State Territory Planning and Construction Inspectorate at the Ministry of Environment <a href="http://www.vtpsi.lt">www.vtpsi.lt</a>	National monitoring of planning of territories, constructions and buildings' violations of planning laws; permissions to build and suspension of their validity.
The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education <a href="http://www.skvc.lt">www.skvc.lt</a>	Assessment of quality of education activities and their curriculum; qualifications related to higher education.
Lithuanian Metrology Inspectorate <a href="http://www.metrinsp.lt">www.metrinsp.lt</a>	Quantity of goods indicated on the labels or packages; weighing, counting, measuring and pre-packed goods; metrological control of measuring devices.
The State Department of Tourism at the Ministry of Economy <a href="http://www.tourism.lt">www.tourism.lt</a>	Tourism services and their quality, classification of accommodation services; consumer education in the area of tourism services.
The State Road Transport Inspectorate at the Ministry of Communications <a href="http://www.vkti.gov.lt">www.vkti.gov.lt</a>	Road carrier services; passenger transport fees.

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Sphere of consumer protection activities</b>
The State Railroad Inspectorate at the Ministry of Communications <a href="http://www.vgi.lt">www.vgi.lt</a>	Quality of railroad carriages; train timetables.
The Lithuanian Maritime Safety Administration <a href="http://www.msa.lt">www.msa.lt</a>	Safety of maritime services.

### 1.3. NATIONAL CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS

- **Nacionalinė vartotojų konfederacija (National Consumer Confederation)**

*Address:* Stikliu Str. 8, LT-01140 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 5 261 5929

*E-mail:* [konfederacija@vartotojai.eu](mailto:konfederacija@vartotojai.eu)

*Website:* [www.vartotojai.eu](http://www.vartotojai.eu)

Activities of the National Consumer Confederation are as follows:

- Representation and advocacy of consumer rights in various governmental institutions.
- Collect and compile information on consumer rights protection policy and activities of NGOs.
- Making proposals for drafting of legal acts related to settlement of consumer disputes and protection of consumer rights.

- **Lietuvos nacionalinė vartotojų federacija (Lithuanian National Consumer Federation)**

*Address:* Stikliu St. 8, LT-01140 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 5 261 5979

*E-mail:* [info@vartotojai.eu](mailto:info@vartotojai.eu)

*Website:* [www.vartotojai.eu](http://www.vartotojai.eu)

- **Lietuvos vartotojų asociacija (Lithuanian Consumer Association)**

*Address:* Jogailos St. 5-1, LT-01116 Vilnius

*Phone/Fax:* +370 5 261 9065

*E-mail:* [vartasoc@takas.lt](mailto:vartasoc@takas.lt)

The Lithuanian Consumer Association was established in 1989. This association protects consumer rights, their economic and social interests in governmental institutions, courts, non-governmental organisations. The Association protects consumer rights related to faulty goods, services, misleading advertising, unfair terms of contracts, etc.

- **Lietuvos vartotojų institutas (Lithuanian Consumer Institute)**

*Address:* S. Konarskio Str. 49, LT-01323 Vilnius

*Phone /Fax:* +370 5 231 0711

*E-mail:* [info@vartotojai.lt](mailto:info@vartotojai.lt)

*Website:* [www.vartotojai.lt](http://www.vartotojai.lt)

The Lithuanian Consumer Institute is a non-governmental non-profit organisation established in 2000.

The Lithuanian Consumer Institute gives advice to consumers and professionals on consumer rights by telephone and during events about the guarantees and safety of goods and services, return and replacement of goods, financial services, environmental and tourism rights, the labelling of products etc. The Institute makes proposals and comments for draft legal acts

which are submitted to the Parliament, the Government and Ministries. The Institute also investigates and conducts surveys on consumer opinion about products and services, etc. The Institute produces articles in mass media, prepares and issues books and leaflets on consumer protection.

- **Lietuvos vartotojų sąjunga (Lithuanian Consumer Union)**

*Address:* Savanorių Ave. 352-205, LT- 49384 Kaunas

*Phone:* +370 3 730 8586, +370 3 732 3491

*E-mail:* [lvs@takas.lt](mailto:lvs@takas.lt)

The main activity is to give advice to consumers regarding dispute settlement in case of breach of consumers' rights. The Union gives information about their rights and ways to protect them, prepares necessary documents, i.e. complaints, applications, etc. The Union is also involved in education of consumers and businesses on consumer rights and their protection.

- **Šiaulių vartotojų federacija (Šiauliai Consumer Federation)**

*Address:* J. Basanavičiaus St. 17, LT-76233 Šiauliai

*Phone:* +370 4 142 5291

Activities of the Šiauliai Consumer Federation:

- Informs consumers about their rights and responsibilities of producers and sellers/service providers.
- Gives advice to consumers.
- Educates consumers through mass media.

- **Vakarų Lietuvos vartotojų federacija (Western Lithuania Consumers' Federation)**

*Address:* Tilto St. 8, LT-91248 Klaipėda

*Phone/Fax:* +370 4 631 1246

*E-mail:* [vartinfo@takas.lt](mailto:vartinfo@takas.lt)

*Website:* [www.vlvf.org](http://www.vlvf.org)

The Federation:

- Informs and consults consumers of their rights and protection of their legitimate interests;
- Provides Consumer Education aiming to empower consumers with knowledge and skills necessary to make informed choices of daily goods and services.
- Investigates and conducts monitoring of consumers' opinion and markets.
- Publishes periodic newsletters for consumers.

- **Vartotojų ir žmogaus teisių gynimo organizacija (Consumer and Human Rights Protection Organisation)**

*Address:* Žveju St. 42-24, Palanga

*Phone:* +370 4 605 3050

*E-mail:* [vartotojai@gmail.com](mailto:vartotojai@gmail.com)

Activities of this organisation are:

- Consumer rights protection in buying goods, financial services, public, domestic and telecommunication and tourism services.
- Consumer education.

- **Vartotojų teisių gynimo centras (Consumer Rights Protection Centre)**

*Address:* V. Mykoliaičio-Putino St. 5-201, LT-03106 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 6 863 9356

*Fax:* +370 5 213 3295

*E-mail:* [virtotojucentras@post.skynet.lt](mailto:virtotojucentras@post.skynet.lt)

*Website:* [www.virtotojucentras.lt](http://www.virtotojucentras.lt)

This non-governmental organisation was established on 20 December 2000. Lawyers of this Centre consult consumers and, if necessary, represent them in court. The Centre also mediates and helps to solve the problems between consumers and sellers/ service providers. The Consumer Rights Protection Centre represents consumer interests in the Public Commission of Vilnius City Dwelling-houses and is member of the State Consumer Rights Protection Board.

- **Lietuvos gyventojų patarėjų sąjunga (The Lithuanian Citizens Advice Union)**

*Address:* J. Basanavičius St. 20-11, LT-03224 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 5 262 3009

*E-mail:* [LGPS@takas.lt](mailto:LGPS@takas.lt)

*Website:* [www.lgps.w3.lt](http://www.lgps.w3.lt)

The Lithuanian Citizens Advice Union (LCAU) was established in 1998 to create a mechanism for implementing the right of citizens to access to information. The LCAU is based on the experience of Great Britain's Citizens Advice Bureaus. The main principles of LCAU work are independence, fairness, confidentiality, free of charge advice and impartiality. The LCAU volunteers inform and consult citizens on various issues. The Lithuanian Citizens Advice Union has 17 local branches and 12 advice bureaus.

- **Lietuvos Respublikos daugiabučių namų savininkų bendrijų asociacijų federacija (Federation of Home Owners' Associations of the Republic of Lithuania)**

*Address:* Vingriu St. 11A, LT-01141 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 5 261 1003

*Fax:* +370 5 212 0647

*E-mail:* [federacija@lhoa.lt](mailto:federacija@lhoa.lt)

This Federation organizes education and information for the Home Owners associations, their members and inhabitants of blockhouses at national level. The Federation examines complaints received from the members of Federation, associations and inhabitants as concerns heating, water, public utilities tariffs and other questions of local government. It protects communities and their members' rights, legal interests, and also represents them in governmental institutions and courts. This Federation takes part in preparation and execution of housing renovation and modernization programme.

- **Buitinių vartotojų sąjunga (Domestic Consumer Union)**

*Address:* Žirmunu Str. 104-106, LT- 09121 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 6 866 5887, +370 5 276 4865

*E-mail:* [antanasm@iti.lt](mailto:antanasm@iti.lt)

*Website:* [www.krantai.lt](http://www.krantai.lt)



Union's activities:

- Consumer education;
- Consumer information;
- Consumer advice;
- Analysis of legal acts and how they protect public interest;
- Representation of consumer rights and legal interests related to supply of energy, gas and drinking water.

- **Nacionalinė vandens, elektros ir šilumos vartotojų gynimo lyga (National League for Protection of Consumers of Gas, Electricity and Heating)**

*Address:* Gynėjų Str. 4-320, LT-01109 Vilnius

*Phone:* +370 5 239 6997, *Mobile phone:* +370 6 529 8381

*E-mail:* [kegrin@lrs.lt](mailto:kegrin@lrs.lt)

*Website:* [www.vartotojulyga.lt](http://www.vartotojulyga.lt)

The National League for Protection of Consumers of Gas, Electricity and Heating which consolidates 388 members was established in 2005. The main goal of this League is to represent and protect consumer rights and their legitimate interests. The key activities of this NGO are as follows:

- Represent and protect consumer rights and legitimate interests of its members and consumers of gas, electricity and heating services both in court and under alternative dispute resolution scheme.
- Represent and protect public consumer interests, analyzing and solving problems arising in supply of central heating, electricity and gas.

#### **1.4. NATIONAL COUNCILS/ASSEMBLIES OF CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

In order to ensure the implementation of the functions assigned to the Minister of Justice in the sphere of the protection of consumer rights, the State Consumer Rights Protection Board was set up in 2007 in accordance with the new Law on Consumer Protection of the Republic of Lithuania. The Board is a collegiate advisory body consisting of five representatives of public authorities (state institutions), four representatives of consumer associations (NGOs) and one representative of the Lithuanian Association of Local Authorities. The Board submits proposals to the Ministry concerning the implementation and improvement of the policy of the protection of consumer rights, proposals concerning activities of institutions ensuring the protection of consumer rights and proposals concerning passing or amending legal acts on the protection of consumer rights.

#### **1.5. CONSUMER MEDIA**

Currently there is no specific consumer media in Lithuania.

The Authority uses various media channels to spread the information on consumer protection, i.e. the representatives of the Authority regularly participate in the Radio programme 'Litas prie lito' on the National Lithuanian Radio addressing relevant consumer issues. The articles on consumer protection topics are regularly published in the major National daily paper 'Respublika'.

The website portal [www.vvtat.lt](http://www.vvtat.lt) provides useful information for consumers about unsafe goods and services, the 'black list' of companies which fail to comply with the decisions of the Authority, and the latest update of consumer protection legislation.

The website [www.esaugumas.lt](http://www.esaugumas.lt) run by the Communications Regulatory Authority provides useful information to consumers about spam, phishing, e-commerce, e-banking and other internet safety related issues.

The website [www.draugiskasinternetas.lt](http://www.draugiskasinternetas.lt) launched in 2005 provides information on safe work on the internet and advice how to protect young consumers from harmful information and other potential risks. This programme is implemented by the private telecommunication enterprise in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Centre of Social and Psychological Services, and is supported by the national authorities, such as the Communications Regulatory Authority, Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, International Organizations, etc.

Lithuanian citizens buying goods and services in other Member States of the European Union may get information about protection of their rights from the European Consumer Centre in Lithuania ([www.ecc.lt](http://www.ecc.lt)).

Other consumer protection authorities provide information for consumers in particular areas on their websites (see pages 5-6).

## **1.6. REDRESS BODIES: COURTS AND ADRS**

Consumers whose rights or legitimate interests have been offended by a seller/ service provider have to contact the seller/service provider first to resolve a dispute. If they fail to reach an agreement, consumer is entitled to address the Authority, the State Non-food Products Inspectorate under the Ministry of Economy, the State Food and Veterinary Service and other out-of-court dispute settlement bodies for assistance. Consumers may also turn to court according to the procedure laid down by laws.

The list of institutions which deal with consumer complaints arising from the contracts concluded between consumers and traders/service providers under the out-of-court dispute settlement procedure (hereinafter referred to as 'ADRs') are indicated in the Law on Consumer Protection:

- **The Communications Regulatory Authority of the Republic of Lithuania – in the spheres of electronic communications, postal and courier services**  
*Address:* Algirdo Str. 27A, LT-03219 Vilnius  
*E-mail:* [rrt@rrt.lt](mailto:rrt@rrt.lt)  
*Website:* [www.rrt.lt](http://www.rrt.lt)
- **The Insurance Supervisory Commission of the Republic of Lithuania – in the insurance related cases in line with the Law on Insurance**  
*Address:* Ukmergės Str. 222, LT-07157 Vilnius  
*E-mail:* [dpk@dpk.lt](mailto:dpk@dpk.lt)  
*Website:* [www.dpk.lt](http://www.dpk.lt)

- **The State Energy Inspectorate under the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Lithuania – in the spheres of the protection of consumer rights provided for in the Law on Energy**  
Address: Švitrigailos Str. 11-M, 8 floor, office 2, LT-03228 Vilnius  
E-mail: [vei@vei.lt](mailto:vei@vei.lt)  
Website: [www.vei.lt](http://www.vei.lt)
- **The National Control Commission for Prices and Energy – in the spheres of the protection of consumer rights provided for in the Law on Energy**  
Address: Algirdo Str. 27, LT-03219 Vilnius  
E-mail: [info@regula.lt](mailto:info@regula.lt)  
Website: [www.regula.lt](http://www.regula.lt)
- **The State Consumer Rights Protection Authority – in other fields of consumer rights protection**  
Address: Vilnius Str. 25, LT-01402 Vilnius  
E-mail: [tarnyba@vvtat.lt](mailto:tarnyba@vvtat.lt)  
Website: [www.vvtat.lt](http://www.vvtat.lt)

Other institutions – in the cases provided for in the laws.

Once the investigation of consumer's complaint is completed, the competent ADR body takes one of the following decisions:

- 1) to satisfy the request of the consumer;
- 2) to partially satisfy the request of the consumer;
- 3) to reject the request of the consumer.

Consumers always have a possibility to bring an action in court in accordance with the civil proceedings.

## 1.7. EUROPEAN CONSUMER CENTRE

The European Consumer Centre (ECC) in Lithuania was established in 2005. The State Consumer Rights Protection Authority is the host organization of the ECC.

Address: Odminių str. 12, LT-01122 Vilnius  
Phone: +370 5 265 0368  
Fax: +370 5 262 3123  
E-mail: [info@ecc.lt](mailto:info@ecc.lt)  
Website: [www.ecc.lt](http://www.ecc.lt)

## 1.8. SELF-REGULATION

- **Development of Self-regulation mechanism in Lithuania**  
The system of self-regulation in Lithuania was established in 2004.

There is a Court of Honour of Insurance Brokers established in accordance with the Law on Insurance. Three insurance brokers who have relevant experience (not less than 3 years) in insurance mediation are nominated by the General Assembly of Insurance Brokers' Chamber.

The Insurance Supervisory Commission and the State Consumer Rights Protection Authority nominate one member each to this Court.

The Lithuanian Brewers' Code of Good Practice adopted in 2005, and was updated in 2007 providing more strict requirements for beer advertising and involvement of young people in beer advertising. The Lithuanian Brewers' Association also deals with other relevant issues related to promotion and sales of beer, and makes proposals regarding necessary amendments of the legislation.

The Codes of Good Practice of Lithuanian Brewers' Association and Lithuanian Association of Trading Enterprises are available on the website [www.vvtat.lt](http://www.vvtat.lt)

- **Asociacija Lietuvos reklamos biuras (Association 'Lithuanian Advertising Bureau')**

*Address:* Lvovo Str. 12, LT-09313 Vilnius

*Tel:* +370 601 07333 (mobile)

*Fax:* +370 5 2780795

*E-mail:* [info@reklamosbiuras.lt](mailto:info@reklamosbiuras.lt)

*Website:* [www.reklamosbiuras.lt](http://www.reklamosbiuras.lt)

In March 2005 the association 'Lietuvos Reklamos biuras' (Lithuanian Advertising Bureau) was established by the initiative of Lithuanian advertising agencies and media representatives. The Advertising Bureau aims to develop advertising sector in Lithuania and to create and improve management of self-regulation and fair competition in advertising, thus ensuring consumer protection and public interest. It is also responsible for the administration of self-regulation system and the national advertising activity code, which is based on the implementation of the Advertising Activity Code of International Chamber of Commerce, so that all advertisements which do not comply with the standards are quickly corrected and eliminated.

The Authority takes part in the work of 'Reklamos biuras'. The Disputes Resolution Commission is empowered with a prerogative power to make decisions in the cases related to advertising arising from complaints received by the Lithuanian Advertising Bureau.

## 2. Consumer policies

### 2.1. CONSUMER PROTECTION LEGISLATION

The main National laws on consumer protection are listed below:

- The Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania establishes key provisions related to consumer contracts, rights and obligations of consumers and sellers/service providers, timeshare regulations, provisional list of unfair terms in consumer contracts, and lays down provisions related to distance selling, return and replacement of goods and contracts concluded away from business premises.
- Law on Consumer Protection [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=306060](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=306060). This Law defines consumer rights, spheres of the protection of consumer rights, establishes the institutional framework of consumer protection and competence of the authorities, regulates consumer education, relations of consumers and sellers, suppliers of services, the out-of-court dispute resolution procedure and the liability for violations of the legal acts regulating protection of consumer rights.

- Law on Alcohol Control [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=220026](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=220026)
- Law on Heat Sector [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=305480](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=305480)
- Law on Tobacco Control [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=227806](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=227806)
- Law on Product Safety [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=148741](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=148741)
- Law on Advertising - [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=315631](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=315631)
- Law on Electronic Communications
- Law on Electricity
- Law on Energy
- Law on Food
- Law on Payment.

The key aims, objectives and priority areas of consumer protection are set out in the Lithuanian National Strategy for Consumer Protection 2007-2010 approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

## 2.2. CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS

There is no official definition of consumer organisation or criteria in Lithuania for determining or recognizing a consumer organisation at national level. Consumer associations are established and operate under the Law on Associations. An association is a public legal person of limited civil liability which has its name and whose purpose is to coordinate activities of the association members, to represent and to protect interests of the association members or to meet other public interests.

However, the Law on Consumer Protection, Article 31 empowers consumer associations to protect the public interest of consumers, provided such associations meet the following conditions:

- are registered in the Register of the Legal Entities;
- the purpose of activities, indicated in the documents of incorporation, is representation and protection of consumer rights and interests;
- have at least 20 members;
- are independent of business interests and other interests which are not related to the protection of consumer rights.

Under the Law on Consumer Protection consumer associations meeting the above-mentioned conditions and after they present an activity report, are entitled to receive financial support from the state.

Besides, the Law lays down the list of specific rights of consumer associations, i.e:

- to survey opinion of consumers about the assortment of goods and services, their quality, organisation of trade and supply of services;
- to present to state and municipal institutions proposals on the prohibition of production and sale of goods and supply of services hazardous to consumer health;
- to submit to sellers and service suppliers proposals concerning improvement of the protection of consumer rights;
- to educate consumers, to issue publications intended for them, to prepare broadcasts, etc;

Consumer associations are also entitled to represent consumers resolving disputes under the out-of-court procedure, and defend public interest of consumers in accordance with the legal procedure.

## 2.3. ENFORCEMENT/REDRESS

- **The State Consumer Rights Protection Authority (the Authority)**

The Authority investigates individual consumer complaints and handles consumer disputes under the out-of-court procedure, and imposes economic sanctions for infringements of the Law on Consumer Rights Protection, the Law on Product Safety, Law on Advertising, Law on Payments and the Law on Prohibition of Unfair Business-to-Consumer Commercial Practices.

The Authority checks fairness of consumer contracts' terms, and once it establishes that the terms and conditions of a consumer contract are unfair the Authority must contact the seller/ service provider and suggest amending, repealing or discontinuing application of the unfair terms and conditions when concluding contracts with consumers within 14 days. If the seller/ service provider does not fulfil the suggestion of the Authority it has the right to turn to the court with a claim or complaint asking to acknowledge the unfair terms and conditions invalid or amend them.

The Authority controls enforcement of the provisions of the Law on Advertising, with an exception of misleading and comparative advertising. The officials of the Authority have a right to obligate operators of advertising activity to cease the usage of advertising that does not meet the requirements set in the Law on Advertising.

Decisions adopted by the Authority under the out-of-court dispute resolution procedure are not binding. Information on the traders/ service providers who fail to implement the decisions of the Authority is available for public on the official website of the Authority ([www.vvtat.lt](http://www.vvtat.lt)).

A consumer presuming that the trader/ service provider has violated his rights or interests protected by law, has the right to address the seller/ service provider requesting for return of the goods, elimination of the defects, reduction of the price, replacement and (or) provision of information. If the seller/ service provider fails to satisfy consumer's request regarding the acquired unsafe and (or) faulty goods or services, he shall have the right to contact **the State Food and Veterinary Service, the State Non-Food Products Inspectorate or the State Public Health Service** or other competent authorities handling consumer disputes (the Communications Regulatory Authority of the Republic of Lithuania, the State Energy Inspectorate, Insurance Supervisory Commission, etc.). When settling disputes the complaint handling bodies are entitled to ask the consumer for additional information, to receive from national and local authorities the information necessary for settlement of disputes and taking of decisions; request the seller/ service provider to present the evidence necessary to examine the consumer's complaint and to receive explanations orally or in writing, and to get expertise from national and local authorities. The competent body must examine the consumer's complaint within 20 working days from the receipt of the complaint. After having examined the consumer's complaint, the State Food and Veterinary Service, the State Non-Food Products Inspectorate and the State Public Health Service Inspectorate complete an inspection report specifying whether the consumer's request is justified or not, and propose to the seller/service provider to satisfy the consumer's request within a set time limit. If the seller/service provider fails to fulfil the suggestion of the authorities to satisfy the consumer's request, these institutions shall submit a copy of the inspection report to the Authority which solves an issue regarding the protection of consumer rights.

## **2.4. INFORMATION AND EDUCATION**

Consumer education is carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Authority and other state and local authorities, consumer associations, the European Consumer Centre and other stakeholders in Lithuania.

During the recent years numerous initiatives have been implemented in the field of consumer education. Consumer Education is organized in a form of articles published in the National and Regional media, interviews and programmes on TV and Radio, seminars and public events. Information about consumer rights is provided on the website [www.vvtat.lt](http://www.vvtat.lt) on other websites of the Lithuanian national authorities and consumer associations.

At the International level the Authority participates and implements various projects related to consumer education, e.g. DOLCETA project ([www.dolceta.eu](http://www.dolceta.eu)) which is aimed to develop interactive consumer education tool in all EU Member States. This proved to be a very good way to inform and educate consumers. The project results are promoted making presentations in schools and other educational establishments.

## **2.5. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION/RESEARCH**

The Authority conducts regular online consumer opinion surveys on their website to find out the most relevant consumer issues and take necessary measures to address them.

The Authority has been implementing the EU funded project *'Impact Assessment on the Lithuanian National Law of the European Commission Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Consumer Rights'*. The survey of various stakeholders (businesses, consumer associations and public authorities) was conducted in order to collect their views on the potential impact of the provisions of the proposed Directive to the national regulation of consumer protection and necessary amendments.

In the end of 2010 the Authority is going to conduct public surveys on consumer awareness of the Authority's activities and consumer rights.

The Authority collects data about consumer complaints. All information about consumer complaints and their nature and geographical coverage for the period of 6 months and a year are available on the Authority's website ([www.vvtat.lt](http://www.vvtat.lt)).