

The Project

As the Member States of the European Union draw closer to each other, **legal professionals** (including judges and court staff, barristers and solicitors, in-house legal counsel, policy makers and legislators, legal information managers, paralegals, academics, legislators and compliance managers) across Europe more and more often face the need to access case law from other Member States to carry out their work. This applies, in particular, to national court rulings concerning Community law.

In practice, however, access to case law from other Member States, especially if this means other languages, is still **severely hampered**. Progress is urgently needed in systems and services which address the real-world challenges faced by legal professionals in this area. Full access is needed, for example, to legislation and case law in the area of **consumer protection** if companies and citizens are to feel free to engage in cross-border transactions within the European Single Market.

EUCases (“European and National CASE Law and Legislation Linked in Open Data Stack”), a project supported by the EU 7th Framework Programme and running from 2013 to 2015, has the ambition to make a real change in tackling this challenge. The project establishes a unique Pan-European legal platform – the **EUCases Linking Platform** – as well as a

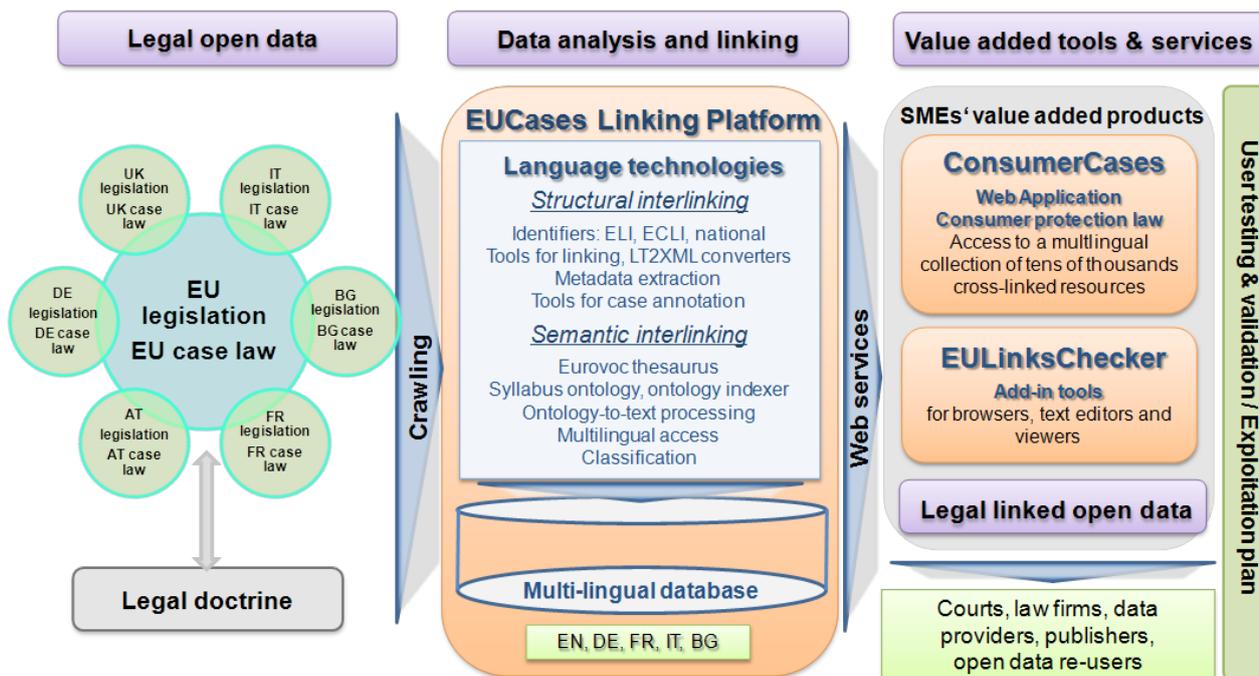
range of services linking legislation and case law of Member States to the European Union legal system, thus providing access and search facilities at European level. It transforms multilingual legal open data into linked open data after semantic and structural analysis to improve their usability and retrieval.

For this task state of the art Natural Language Technologies are used. The project work involves downloading and processing millions of legal documents and open access doctrinal work from the European and national legislative and case law (high courts and appeal courts) portals¹ of six Member States which act as pilot countries: Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy and the UK.

EUCases enriches the data by automatically structuring legislation and case law in legal XML, classifying the legal texts, and connecting the terms to ontologies. The system makes data more accessible by navigating them across legal systems using multilingual legal ontologies, adding metadata, case summaries, classifying documents according to the EuroVoc² thesaurus, providing automated translation of the queries in other languages to facilitate cross lingual search.

1 *EUR-Lex (EU), Legifrance (FR), legislation.gov.uk (UK), Supreme Court (UK), Bundesgerichtshof (DE), Gesetze im internet (DE), Rechtsinformati-onssystem (AT), Supreme Court of Cassation (BG), Supreme Administrative Court (BG), Normattiva (IT), Consiglio di Stato (IT), DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) and others.*

2 EuroVoc is a multilingual, multidisciplinary thesaurus maintained by the EU’s Publication Office. Cf. eurovoc.europa.eu



Serving legal professionals

The EUCases Linking platform containing legal data forms the basis for two services:

1. The **ConsumerCases** online service provides access to a multilingual collection of national court decisions linked with EU and national legislation and doctrine in the area of consumer protection law. The application will offer its users a range of features via a multilingual interface, including:
 - Browsing legislation and case law by subject (keywords), type of documents, country and jurisdiction;
 - Searching via a variety of complex search queries;
 - Viewing legal documents and extracting knowledge, via well-structured and interlinked texts which allow users, for instance, to easily retrieve a list of all referring court decisions to a given provision without losing the context.
2. **EULinksChecker** interactively assists legal professionals while editing or browsing documents by identifying and establishing connections with regulations and legal ontologies, helping to clarify the meaning of the document, and making its terminology more uniform. It can be the basis for further development of value-added products and services and to serve as a pre-paid commercial service for end-users such as data providers, publishers or advanced open data re-users. The EULinksChecker is developed as a series of installable add-in applications (connected via the internet to the EUCases Linking Platform), which can be integrated in the most popular software products, e.g. Internet Explorer™, Firefox™, Google Chrome™, Microsoft Word™, Open Office Writer™ and Adobe Reader™.

Serving Europe

EUCases responds to the EU's ambition to "establish a single European legal order", for which "availability of national databases on national court rulings concerning Community law" is of essential importance. By fully exploiting open data from the public sector for the development of innovative services, the project is firmly aligned with the 2003 Directive on Public Sector Information (PSI)³ and the European Commission's strategy on Open Data, as laid out in the 2012 Communication on „Open data - An engine for innovation, growth and transparent governance“.⁴

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/european-law-psi>

⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0882:FIN:EN:PDF>

The prototype developed by EUCases concerns the domain of consumer law - a critical sector for harmonization of EU law and the achievement of a trusted European common market. As such, services provided will not only increase the productivity of judges and lawyers, as well as the quality of their work, but will also benefit Europe at large, by boosting transparency and trust for all parties engaged in cross-country transactions.

Key Facts

Duration: 2 years (1.10.2013 – 30.09.2015)

Budget: € 1 860 840

EU Funding: € 1 499 000

The Consortium

The project team consists of four dynamic SMEs (**APIS** from Bulgaria, **Averbis** and **empirica** from Germany, and **Nomotika** from Italy) and two research institutions which are at the forefront of European research on legal ontologies, **University of Torino** and the **Institute of Information and Communication Technology** at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.



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