[AT] 2017 RTR conciliation report shows telecommunications and media infringements at a record low

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In its 2017 conciliation report, Austria's Rundfunk und Telekom Regulierungs-GmbH (Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications - RTR GmbH), which provides operational support for the Austrian broadcasting and audiovisual media regulator Kommunikationsbehörde Austria (KommAustria), founded in 2001, recorded a steady fall in the number of cases submitted to it in the telecommunications and media fields. According to the report, users only submitted 1 893 cases for conciliation in these two fields last year. This represents a 5% drop compared with the previous year and is the lowest figure for 15 years. A record 84% of these cases were successfully resolved by the conciliation body in 2017.

The main reason given by the regulator for these positive figures is its motto "Smart statt hart" (smart not hard), which reflects its efforts to promote open dialogue on equal terms between operators and customers. With operators keen to settle cases quickly and amicably, RTR GmbH was not required to take harsh measures to protect consumers.

According to the conciliation body, there was a noticeable increase in the number of disputes relating to (i) data roaming charges following the introduction of the new EU roaming rules (2016: 117, 2017: 216), and (ii) mobile network quality (2016: 79, 2017: 148). The largest category of disputes (629 cases) concerned the interpretation of contracts, including unclear clauses or terms of cancellation. The 2017 report mentioned a total of 80 cases relating to pay-TV services. Seven of these were billing disputes (five fewer than the previous year) and 71 concerned other contractual matters (27 fewer than in 2016). Two cases did not fall into any category, according to the regulator. In contrast, there was a sharp fall in the number of billing disputes involving third-party services (2016: 398, 2017: 247), which was again a result of the operators' general willingness to cooperate.

As part of its data collection activities, RTR GmbH has also set up a new report line for telephone number misuse following an increase in the number of so-called 'ping calls' that many Austrians were bombarded with at the start of this year. These calls involve people with foreign numbers making a call but disconnecting before it is picked up. They do this in order to provoke the call recipient to ring

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back, which is not only a nuisance but can also be expensive where long-distance calls are concerned. Until now, there have been no concrete figures showing how many Austrians have actually received or are receiving ping calls, so the new report line should help collect this information and offer some relief.

Since the Austrian legislator appointed RTR GmbH as the sector-specific consumer protection body in 1997, its conciliation body has, according to its own figures, conducted around 60 000 procedures, answered more than 50 000 written queries and held tens of thousands of telephone consultations. In accordance with the 'Digital First' initiative, cases, information and queries can be submitted easily via a web portal without any red tape.

Tätigkeitsbericht der Schlichtungsstellen

https://www.rtr.at/de/inf/STR_Bericht2017/STR-Bericht2017.pdf

RTR conciliation bodies' activity report

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