EUCases is a collaborative Research Project supported by Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) funding. The project will develop a unique pan-European law and case law Linking Platform transforming multilingual legal open data into linked open data after semantic and structural analysis. Supported by the research partners, two SMEs from the legal information provision sector will develop a portfolio of innovative data analysis and language technology components to enrich legal documents, transforming research into innovative high tech value-added services and products in the SMEs’ global market.

Two end-user applications will prove the viability of the platform. The ConsumerCases online service will provide access to a multilingual collection of national court decisions linked with EU and national legislation and doctrine in the area of consumer protection law. EULinksChecker will interactively assist legal professionals while editing or browsing documents by identifying and establishing connections with regulations and legal ontologies. With 64% of the EU contribution for SMEs, the project responds to the EU’s priority for the establishment of a single European legal order by the availability of national databases on national court rulings concerning Community law.

A much more detailed flyer can be found at eucases.eu/fact-sheet.
Results from the Survey on User Needs

Back in November 2013, we asked legal professionals in several EU member states to participate in an online survey (see http://eucases.eu/survey/) on user needs for the services being developed in the project. Three months later, 95 participants from 5 countries shared their thoughts. Roughly a third of the answers came from in-house lawyers, another quarter from lawyer/barristers/solicitors. We can assume that practically all legal professionals rely on case law as a source of law and/or source of legal knowledge and inspiration, as almost 90% of the respondents quoted case law as part of their everyday work.

About 1/3 of the respondents say that the tools used for searching cross-border legal information are not adequate to user needs. More than half of them reckon that the reason for this is the fact that these legal information services are not complete enough (56%), whereas 1/3 of them think that they are difficult to use (34%) and 6% experienced difficulties with foreign languages. These two findings should be taken into account by the development of the EUCases service.

Surprisingly and most importantly for this project, the information from foreign countries is not only sought when discussing matters related to the application of EU Law: 54% of respondents say that they use EU law even in matters not related to its application. A mere 13% say that the cross-border legal information that was searched by them has never been connected with the application of EU law while at the same time 34% admit that such information has always been connected with its application. Combined with the fact that 24% consider that in more than half of the cases the searched legal information was case law of the foreign country, this is another important acknowledgement of the vitality of the EUCases idea.

Online resources are the predominant way of getting information, where the commercial sector gets the biggest share, while some free online resources like N-Lex are disregarded or not known at all. The latter fact highlights that there is probably a market niche for the EUCases future developments by providing legal added value services in between EU portals and commercial databases not specialised for accessing law at a European wide dimension.
One of the first project deliverables summarises the results of the analysis performed on the latest scientific and technological developments in the field of legal open data, legal XML, legal ontologies, legal semantic web standards in six EU Member States and in Europe at large. The full analysis of the survey on user needs (cf. page 2) is included as well as an explorative chapter on the state of play of legal open data in Europe. The report concludes that the need for EU level legal information by legal practitioners goes beyond application of EU law. Moreover, existing information portals were found to have severe limitations, because of which they do not match all needs of users regarding access to EU wide legislation. The Deliverable can be accessed at www.eucases.eu/del1_1/.

Report on the state-of-the-art and user needs submitted

D1.1 gives an overview on technological and scientific developments as well as a full analysis of the survey

Coming up...

First Expert Workshop in Torino

Within the EUCases Project, two international expert workshops will be organised to bring together representatives of key stakeholder groups from policy, legislative bodies, judiciary, academia and industry. The First Expert Workshop will be held on Monday, June 16th 2014 in Torino, Italy.

More information on the meeting’s objectives and its background will be available in Newsletter No. 2.

If you would like to participate in and/or the workshop or have any questions just send an e-mail to EUCases@empirica.com.