



FRAUDULENT CREDIT OFFERS: THE FSMA WARNS THE PUBLIC AGAINST VARIOUS COMPANIES OPERATING ILLEGALLY WITHIN BELGIUM

The Financial Services and Markets Authority (FSMA) warns the public against the fraudulent activities of unauthorized lenders approaching consumers who are looking for credit.

The illegally operating companies against which the FSMA warns the public are as follows:

- [Atlantic Finance](#)
- [Island Finance](#)
- [Solar Courtage](#)

None of the above-mentioned companies is an authorized lender or credit intermediary, nor is any of them an authorized insurance intermediary, despite what the companies state on their website. Solar Courtage, Atlantic Finance and Island Finance cannot therefore carry out any activity within Belgium as a lender, credit intermediary or insurance intermediary.

Moreover, according to the information available to the FSMA, it seems that the credit being offered by the above companies is entirely fraudulent. In this type of consumer credit fraud, the companies claiming to be lenders attract consumers by publishing advertisements on their website promoting credit on very favourable terms. The procedure for applying for credit is very simple, and the only condition for obtaining credit is to pay a sum up front intended to cover certain costs.

The justifications given for such a payment can vary: they may be called an insurance premium with a view to insuring the lender against default on the loan, file handling costs, authentication costs, administrative costs, etc.

The means of payment is also a characteristic feature, since the consumer is invited to pay the sum requested via a cash transfer, in other words, by means of an international wire transfer. The use of this technique means that once the payment has been made, it is impossible to retrace its path and identify the persons responsible for the fraud.

Once the amount requested has been paid, the "lender" disappears and the victim never recovers the money transferred.

The FSMA therefore **strongly advises against responding to any offers of credit made by these companies and against making any payment** to them.

More generally, and in order to prevent further fraud, **the FSMA recommends that consumers:**

- **always verify the identity of the company** (company information, home country, etc.). If the company cannot be clearly identified, it should not be trusted. If the company is located outside the European Union, consumers will also have to be aware of the difficulty of legal recourse in the event of a dispute;



- **consult the warnings** published on the FSMA website as well as on the websites of foreign supervisory authorities, not only as regards the lender but also, where applicable, the beneficiary company of the account number provided by the latter.

Please note: the fact that the FSMA has not published a warning about a company does not mean that the latter company holds a valid authorization. While the FSMA seeks to ensure that it publishes warnings in a timely manner, it is entirely possible that the activity of a given company that is operating illegally within Belgium may not yet have been reported to it, all the more so since unauthorized companies tend to change names regularly;

- consult the FSMA website (www.fsma.be) to **check that the company has an authorization**;
- **beware of any request to transfer money to a country without any connection to the lending company** or to the State of which the consumer is a resident, or to make **payments via a cash transfer (via Western Union, for example)**;
- **beware of any offers of credit on very favourable terms** (a large loan in relation to the consumer's financial situation, very low interest rate, particularly long repayment period, etc.) **that would not usually be granted by authorized lenders**;
- **be all the more suspicious if the lender makes the credit subject to the payment of a sum of money intended to cover certain costs.** The justifications given for such a payment can vary: they may be called an insurance premium with a view to insuring the lender against default on the loan, file handling costs, authentication costs, administrative costs, etc. These costs are purely fictitious. Once the money has been paid, the "lender" disappears and the victim never recovers the money transferred;
- **do not accept uncritically the information provided by such companies.** Some unauthorized lenders mention an FSMA and/or FPSE (Federal Public Service Economy) number in the legal information on their websites; these numbers are either non-existent or have been assigned to other companies unrelated to the supposed lenders. Therefore, just because a company mentions an FSMA or an FPSE number on its website does not mean it has actually been authorized by the FSMA. Consumers should also be wary of "cloned firms", namely, companies that pass themselves off as another, authorized company although they have no connection with them. Consumers should always check the information they are given, and an examination of the email addresses or contact information of the companies in question could prove useful for detecting this type of fraud;
- **ask their interlocutor for clear and comprehensible information.** Consumers are advised not to apply for a loan if they do not fully understand what is being offered;



Press release / Fraudulent Credit Offers: The FSMA warns the public against various companies operating illegally within Belgium

More than ever, then, prudence is necessary. In case of any doubt, don't hesitate to contact the FSMA directly (email: info@fsma.be). Please feel free to inform the FSMA of any suspect company about which it has not yet published a warning.

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Press contact	Jim Lannoo Spokesman + 32 2 220 57 06
Email	Press@fsma.be