

Evaluation of procedural and jurisdictional aspects of EU Merger Control

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

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I. Introduction

Preliminary Remark: The following questionnaire has been drafted by the Services of the Directorate General for Competition in order to collect views on some procedural and jurisdictional aspects of EU merger control. The questionnaire does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission and does not prejudice its future decisions, if any, on further action on these aspects.

A. Purpose of the consultation

The purpose of the present consultation is to gather information on particular aspects of the performance of EU merger control. This consultation invites citizens, businesses, associations, public authorities and other stakeholders to provide feedback on their experience/knowledge of issues under scrutiny and what action, if any, should be taken in this regard.

Input from stakeholders will be used in a Staff Working Document to evaluate procedural and jurisdictional aspects of EU merger control. The Commission will carefully analyse the outcome of this consultation and previous consultations as well as the findings of the evaluation as a whole before deciding whether it should take further action.

B. Background

Merger control constitutes one of the instruments of EU competition law. Its main objective is to ensure that competition in the internal market is not distorted by corporate reorganisations in the form of concentrations.

In recent years (particularly in 2009 and from 2013 onwards), the European Commission has taken stock and assessed the functioning of different aspects of EU merger control and identified possible areas for refinement, improvement and simplification.

In particular, the European Commission adopted in 2014 the White Paper "Towards More Effective EU Merger Control (the "White Paper", COM(2014) 449 final). The White Paper confirmed that EU merger control works well and that no fundamental overhaul of the system is needed, but envisaged specific amendments in order to make it more effective.

The key proposals of the White Paper were the following:

1. Introducing a light and tailor-made review of acquisitions of non-controlling minority shareholdings which could harm competition;
2. Making case referrals between Member States and the Commission more business-friendly and effective;
3. Making procedures simpler for certain categories of mergers that normally do not raise competition concerns; and
4. Fostering coherence and convergence between Member States with a view to enhance cooperation and to avoid divergent decisions in parallel merger reviews conducted by the competition authorities of several Member States.

Based on the White Paper, the Commission carried out a public consultation. Respondents mostly agreed that the EU merger control system overall works well but welcomed the White Paper's proposals in relation to the streamlining of the case referral system and simplification.

Recently, a debate has emerged among stakeholders and competition experts on a new topic, namely the effectiveness of the current turnover-based jurisdictional thresholds of EU merger control. These jurisdictional thresholds are set out in Article 1 of the Merger Regulation and determine which transactions have a Union dimension and are reviewed, in principle, by the European Commission.

Some stakeholders have raised the question of whether the turnover-based jurisdictional thresholds allow capturing, under EU merger control rules, all transactions which can potentially have an impact in the internal market. This question may be particularly significant for transactions in the digital economy, but also in other industry sectors, such as pharmaceuticals, where acquisition targets may not have always generated substantial turnover yet, but nevertheless are highly valued and constitute, or are likely to become, an important competitive force in the relevant market(s).

Moreover, recent experience in enforcing the EU merger control rules has shown that certain technical aspects of the procedural and investigative framework for the assessment of mergers may merit further evaluation. Some of these aspects had already been identified in the 2014 Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the White Paper.

Scope of the Evaluation

It therefore appears opportune to build upon the work undertaken so far in the context of the White Paper and prior consultations and complement it by evaluating the following procedural and jurisdictional aspects of EU merger control in more detail:

1. Simplification: the treatment of certain categories of cases that do not generally raise competitive concerns, as set out in the Merger Regulation,^[1] the Implementing Regulation,^[2] and the Commission Notice on simplified procedure;^[3]
2. Functioning of the turnover-based jurisdictional thresholds set out in the Merger Regulation in light of highly valued acquisitions of target companies that have not yet generated substantial turnover;
3. Functioning of the case referral mechanisms set out in the Merger Regulation, the Implementing Regulation and the Commission Notice on case referral;
4. Certain technical aspects of the procedural and investigative framework for the assessment of mergers.

[1] Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 of 20 January 2004 on the control of concentrations between undertakings (the EC Merger Regulation), OJ L 24, 29.01.2004, p. 1.

[2] Commission Regulation (EC) No 802/2004 of 21 April 2004 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004, OJ L 133, 30.04.2004, p. 1, as amended.

[3] Commission Notice on a simplified procedure for treatment of certain concentrations under Council Regulation (EC) 139/2004, OJ C 366, 14 December 2013, p.5 and its Corrigendum to the Commission notice on a simplified procedure for treatment of certain concentrations under Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004, OJ C 011, 15 January 2014, p 6 (the "Commission Notice on simplified procedure").

II. Practical Guide to fill in the questionnaire

Please respond to all questions that you have knowledge about. Feel free to skip those questions that you cannot answer or are unsure about.

Replying to the questions:

- Questions with a radio-button are "single choice": only one option can be chosen.
- Question with a check-box are "multiple choice": several answers can be chosen.
- Questions showing an empty box are free text questions.
- Depending on your answer to a given question, some additional questions may appear automatically asking you to provide further information. This, for example, is the case when the reply "Other" is chosen.
- Please use only the "Previous" and "Next" buttons to navigate through the questionnaire (do not use the backwards or forward button of the browser).

Saving your draft replies

- The questionnaire is split into several sections.
- At the end of each section you have the possibility to either continue replying to the remaining sections of the questionnaire (clicking on "Next") or saving the replies made so far as a draft (clicking on "Save as Draft").
- If you chose "Save as Draft", the system will:
 - show you a message indicating that your draft reply has been saved,
 - give you the link that you will have to use in order to continue replying at a later stage,
 - give you the possibility to send you the link by email (we encourage you to use this option).
- You can then close the application and continue replying to the questionnaire at a later stage by using the said link.

Submitting your final reply

- The submission of the final reply can only be done by clicking the "Submit" button that you will find in the last section "Conclusion and Submission".
- Once you submit your reply, the system will show you a message indicating the case identification number of your reply ("Case Id"). Please keep this Case Id. number as it could be necessary in order to identify your reply in case you want to modify it at a later stage.
- You will also be given the opportunity to either print or download your reply for your own records.

III. About you

Please provide your contact details below:

*1. Are you replying as:

- ☐ a private individual
- ☒ an organisation or a company
- ☐ a public authority or an international organisation

*The name of your organisation/ company/ public authority/ international organisation

LK Shields Solicitors

*Your full name

Marco Hickey

*Email address

mhickey@lkshields.ie

* Organisation represented

1.1 Please indicate which type of organisation or company it is.

- ☐ Academic institution
- ☐ Non-governmental organisation
- ☐ Company/SME/micro-enterprise/sole trader
- ☐ Think tank
- ☐ Media
- ☐ Consumer organisation
- ☐ Industry association
- ☒ Consultancy/law firm
- ☐ Trade union

* 1.1.1 Is it a multinational enterprise (groups with establishments in more than one country)?

- ☐ YES
- ☒ NO

*1.1.2 How many employees does your company have?

- ☐ 1-9
- ☐ 10-49
- ☒ 50-249
- ☐ 250-499
- ☐ 500 or more

***1.2 Please provide a brief description of the activities of your organisation.**

We are a leading Irish corporate and commercial law firm. Our clients are enterprising Irish and international businesses, financial institutions and public bodies.

We apply our legal knowledge and expertise to provide the highest quality legal advice and representation. This approach enables our clients achieve their business aims and objectives. We have a reputation for providing partner driven, accessible and decisive input and work to build in-depth relationships with our clients, learning about their business and providing them with the guidance, support and strategic solutions they require to achieve their aims and meet their objectives. Our lawyers combine their depth of legal knowledge with their commercial experience to deliver business solutions to complex legal issues.

Our role is that of business partner who adds value by providing the highest quality legal advice and representation in a manner that is commercially focused, tailored to the particular needs of the client and delivered in a reliable, timely and cost effective manner.

We have excellent relations with the world's leading law firms with whom we regularly partner on the Irish aspects of international transactions.

We are continually and consistently highly ranked in leading legal publications such as Chambers and Partners, IFLR 1000, Who's Who Legal and The Legal 500 among others.

*1.3 Where are you based?

- ☐ Austria
- ☐ Belgium
- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia
- ☐ Cyprus
- ☐ Czech Republic
- ☐ Denmark
- ☐ Estonia
- ☐ Finland
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Iceland
- ☒ Ireland
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Liechtenstein
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxemburg
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ Norway
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Portugal
- ☐ Romania
- ☐ Slovak Republic
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sweden
- ☐ United Kingdom
- ☐ Other

*Please specify.

Ireland

2. Transparency Register ([Register now](#))

In the interests of transparency, the Commission asks organisations who wish to submit comments in the context of public consultations to provide the Commission and the public at large with information about whom and what they represent by registering in the [Transparency Register](#) and subscribing to its [Code of Conduct](#). If an organisation decides not to provide this information, it is the Commission's stated policy to list the contribution as part of the individual contributions. (Consultation Standards, see COM (2002) 704; Better Regulation guidelines, see SWD(2015)111 final and Communication on ETI Follow-up, see COM (2007) 127).

If you are a registered organisation, please indicate below your Register ID number when replying to the online questionnaire. Your contribution will then be considered as representative of the views of your organisation.

If your organisation is not registered, you have the opportunity to register now, please click on the link in the title. Then you can return to this page, continue replying to the questionnaire and submit your contribution as a registered organisation.

It is important to read the specific privacy statement available on the public consultation website for information on how your personal data and contribution will be used.

For registered organisations: indicate your Register ID number here:

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* 3. Please choose from one of the following options on the use of your contribution:

- ☒ My/our contribution can be directly published with my personal/organisation information (I consent to publication of all information in my contribution in whole or in part including my name/the name of my organisation, and I declare that nothing within my response is unlawful or would infringe the rights of any third party in a manner that would prevent publication).
- ☐ My/our contribution can be directly published provided that I/my organisation remain(s) anonymous (I consent to publication of any information in my contribution in whole or in part (which may include quotes or opinions I express) provided that this is done anonymously. I declare that nothing within my response is unlawful or would infringe the rights of any third party in a manner that would prevent publication. I am aware that I am solely responsible if my answer reveals accidentally my identity).
- ☐ My/our contribution cannot be directly published but may be included within statistical data (I understand that my contribution will not be directly published, but that my anonymised responses may be included in published statistical data, for example, to show general trends in the response to this consultation) Note that your answers may be subject to a request for public access to documents under Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001.

*4. Finally, if required, can the Commission services contact you for further details on the information you have submitted?

☒ YES

☐ NO

IV. Questionnaire

IV.1. Simplification

In December 2013, the Commission adopted a package of measures aimed at simplifying procedures to the fullest extent possible without amending the Merger Regulation itself (the so called "Simplification Package"). In particular, the Simplification Package:

- Widened the scope of application of the so-called simplified procedure for non-problematic cases;
- Streamlined and simplified the forms for notifying mergers to the Commission.

Through the Simplification Package, which entered into force on 1 January 2014, the number of cases dealt with under the simplified procedure has increased by 10 percentage points from an average of 59% over the period 2004-2013 to around 69% of all notified transactions over the period January 2014 to September 2016).

According to the Commission Notice on simplified procedure ("the Notice"), the Commission in principle applies the simplified procedure to each of the following categories of concentrations:

- i. Transactions where two or more undertakings acquire joint control of a joint venture, provided that the joint venture has no, or negligible, actual or foreseen activities within the territory of the European Economic Area (EEA); such cases occur where: (i) the turnover of the joint venture and/or the turnover of the contributed activities is less than EUR 100 million in the EEA territory at the time of notification; and (ii) the total value of assets transferred to the joint venture is less than EUR 100 million in the EEA territory at the time of notification (see point 5 (a) of the Notice);
- ii. Transactions where two or more undertakings merge, or one or more undertakings acquire sole or joint control of another undertaking, provided that none of the parties to the concentration are engaged in business activities in the same product and geographic market, or in a product market which is upstream or downstream from a product market in which any other party to the concentration is engaged (see point 5 (b) of the Notice);
- iii. Transactions where two or more undertakings merge, or one or more undertakings acquire sole or joint control of another undertaking and both of the following conditions are fulfilled: (i) the combined market share of all the parties to the concentration that are engaged in business activities in the same product and geographic market (horizontal relationships) is less than 20 %; (ii) the individual or combined market shares of all the parties to the concentration that are engaged in business activities in a product market which is upstream or downstream from a product market in which any other party to the concentration is engaged (vertical relationships) are less than 30 % (see point 5 (c) of the Notice);
- iv. Transactions where a party is to acquire sole control of an undertaking over which it already has joint control (see point 5 (d) of the Notice)
- v. Transactions where two or more undertakings merge, or one or more undertakings acquire sole or joint control of another undertaking, and both of the following conditions are fulfilled: (i) the combined market share of all the parties to the concentration that are in a horizontal relationship is less than 50 %; and (ii) the increment (delta) of the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) resulting from the concentration is below 150 (see point 6 of the Notice).

The Notice sets out a number of safeguards and exclusions from the simplified procedure (see notably points 8 to 21). The Commission may decide not to accept a proposed concentration under the simplified procedure or revert at a later stage to a full assessment under the normal merger procedure.

The 2014 White Paper made further-reaching proposals for amendments to the Merger Regulation that would make procedures simpler:

- This could be achieved for example by excluding certain non-problematic transactions from the scope of the Commission's merger review, such as the creation of joint ventures that will operate outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and have no impact on European markets;
- Moreover, notification requirements for other non-problematic cases - currently dealt with in a 'simplified' procedure - could be further reduced, cutting costs and administrative burden for businesses.

These proposals are still being assessed. Your response to the following questions will contribute to that assessment.

1. The Merger Regulation provides for a one stop shop review of concentrations. Several categories of cases that are generally unlikely to raise competition concerns and falling under point 5 or 6 of the Notice (see above) are treated under a simplified procedure. To what extent do you consider that the one stop shop review at EU level for concentrations falling under the simplified procedure has created added value for businesses and consumers? Please rate on a scale from 1 to 7.

(1 = "did not create much added value"; 7 = "created much added value"):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Your rating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Please explain.

LK Shields fully shares the Commission's objective of easing administrative burdens under merger control proceedings, and the idea behind the Merger Regulation's provision for a one stop shop review of concentrations.

The one stop shop review at EU level for concentrations falling under the simplified procedure has created added value in that it has made the process of competition approval faster (with an initial phase of 25 working days), cheaper and administratively less burdensome (including, in terms of workload and resources spent). Overall, being a "one stop shop", this also eliminates the need to notify the transaction in multiple forums, and saves parties from forum hopping.

We appreciate that the Commission Notice on simplified procedure for treatment of certain concentrations under Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 (2013/C-366/04) (the "Commission Notice") aims to simplify merger control processes as far as possible without requiring the Merger Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) 139/2004) (the "Merger Regulation") to be amended.

However, as this submission will set out, it is also our belief that the process could be streamlined further. It is appreciated that some of these suggestions may require amendments to the Merger Regulation.

THE 2014 WHITE PAPER:

It could, for instance, be more effective if the recommendations in the Commission's 2014 White Paper- Towards More Effective Merger Control (the "2014 White Paper"), paragraph 77, are taken into account. These include:

(i) Leaving the creation of a full-function joint venture located and operating totally outside the EEA (and which would not have any impact on markets within the EEA) beyond the scope of the Merger Regulations, such that these joint ventures would not have to be notified to the Commission, even if the turnover thresholds of Article 1 are met; and

(ii) The exemption from notification certain categories of transactions that normally do not raise any competition concerns (such as those transactions which do not involve any horizontal or vertical relationships between the merging undertakings and are currently dealt with under a simplified procedure) from mandatory prior notification.

The adoption of these proposals could be viewed as a step towards minimising the burden of mandatory prior notification for certain cases. This will, in turn, allow parties to a transaction to save time, cost and effort that are often not warranted given the lack of competition concerns these transactions raise.

We encourage the Commission's initiative in the 2014 White Paper to explore ways to eliminate the redundant filing requirements that presently arise for transactions having no conceivable nexus with the EU. Nonetheless, we request that the Commission encourages the Member States to adopt a consistent approach with that of the EU on the treatment of joint ventures with no effect on national Member States. Whilst filings may not need to be made at the European Commission level, the new system may mean that parties have to make filings at national level which could be equally or (in the absence of the one-stop shop under the EU Merger Regulation) more burdensome.

THE DEEMED APPROVAL MODEL:

Further simplification can be achieved by adopting a procedure similar to that in place in the US. The thrust of the EU regime is individual decisions, while in the US, the process operates on the basis of deemed approval.

In the US, under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Antitrust Improvements Act 1976, the parties are free to close their deal if the waiting period of 30 days has expired. If the regulators (the Federal Trade Commission (the "FTC") and the Assistant Attorney-General in charge of the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice (the "AG")) do nothing within that period, the transaction is deemed to have been approved. In addition, the filing parties may even request that the waiting period for a particular transaction be terminated early ("early termination").

During the waiting period, the FTC and the AG may request further information in order to help them assess whether the proposed transaction violates the antitrust laws of the United States or could cause an anti-competitive effect in the parties' markets.

TIMELINES AND WAITING PERIODS:

The Commission Notice, in paragraph 26, states that the “Commission will endeavour to issue a short-form decision as soon as practicable following the expiry of the 15 working day period during which Member States may request referral of a notified concentration pursuant to Article 9 of the Merger Regulation.”

This timeline of 15 working days is framed in the language of a best efforts guideline, rather than being prescriptive. There would have been greater value added for businesses were these timelines were to be prescriptive, such that the parties to a transaction could rely definitively on when they would hear back from the Commission.

Further simplification of the treatment of certain categories of non-problematic cases

2. In your experience, and taking into account in particular the effects of the 2013 Simplification Package, has the fact that the above mentioned categories of merger cases are treated under the simplified procedure contributed to reducing the burden on companies (notably the merging parties) compared to the treatment under the normal procedure?

(i) Mergers without any horizontal and vertical overlaps within the EEA or relevant geographic markets that comprise the EEA, such as worldwide markets (transactions falling under point 5b of the Notice);

- ☒ YES
☐ NO
☐ OTHER

Please explain

(ii) Mergers leading only to limited combined market shares or limited increments or to vertical relationships with limited shares on the upstream and downstream markets within the EEA or relevant geographic markets that comprise the EEA (transactions falling under point 5c or point 6 of the Notice);

- ☒ YES
☐ NO
☐ OTHER

Please explain

(iii) Joint ventures with no or limited activities (actual or foreseen), turnover or assets in the EEA (transactions falling under point 5a of the Notice);

- ☒ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain

(iv) Transactions where a company acquires sole control of a joint venture over which it already has joint control (transactions falling under point 5d of the Notice).

- ☒ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain

3. As indicated, the Commission may decide not to accept a proposed concentration under the simplified procedure or revert at a later stage to a full assessment under the normal merger procedure. Have you dealt with or otherwise been involved in merger cases notified to the European Commission in the last five years that changed from simplified treatment under the Notice to the normal review procedure?

(i) In the pre-notification phase:

- ☐ YES
- ☒ NO

Please explain under which category of simplified cases (listed in question 2 above) it initially fell and the reasons underlying the change to the normal procedure.

(ii) Post notification:

- ☐ YES
- ☒ NO

Please explain under which category of simplified cases (listed in question 2 above) it initially fell and the reasons underlying the change to the normal procedure.

4. Have you dealt with or otherwise been involved in any merger cases which fell under the relevant categories of cases listed in question 2 and was thus potentially eligible for notification under the simplified procedure but where, from the outset, the parties decided to follow the normal review procedure?

- ☐ YES
☒ NO

Please explain under which category of simplified cases it fell and the reasons why the case was notified under the normal procedure.

5. Based on your experience, do you consider that, beyond the types of cases listed in question 2, there are any other categories of cases that are generally not likely to raise competition concerns but do not currently benefit from the simplified procedure?

- ☐ YES
☒ NO
☐ OTHER

Please explain

6. The main objective of the Merger Regulation is to ensure the review of concentrations with an EU dimension in order to prevent harmful effects on competition in the EEA. Do you consider that the costs (in terms of workload and resources spent) incurred by businesses when notifying the cases that fall under the simplified procedure (listed in question 2 above) have been proportionate in order to achieve this objective of the Merger Regulation?

- ☒ YES
☐ NO
☐ OTHER

Please explain your answer with respect to each of the categories of cases listed in question 2 above.

- Transactions falling under point 5a of the Notice:

☒ YES

☐ NO

Please explain.

- Transactions falling under point 5b of the Notice:

☒ YES

☐ NO

Please explain.

- Transactions falling under point 5c or point 6 of the Notice:

☒ YES

☐ NO

Please explain.

- Transactions falling under point 5d of the Notice:

☒ YES

☐ NO

Please explain.

7. To which extent have such costs (in terms of workload and resources spent) been reduced by the 2013 Simplification Package? Please explain.

Further to our response to Question 1 above, we appreciate that the 2013 Simplification Package has reduced costs (regarding workload and resources spent) for certain kinds of transactions.

However, these costs could be cut further if the 2014 White Paper proposals, as highlighted above in our response to Question 1, were to be adopted. Characterising certain transactions which do not raise competition concerns as being exempted or outside the review jurisdiction under the Merger Regulation will free up resources, including time and workload, for both the parties and the Commission.

8. On the basis of your experience on the functioning of the Merger Regulation, particularly after the changes introduced with the 2013 Simplification Package, and your knowledge of the enforcement practice of the Commission in recent years, do you consider that there is currently scope for further simplification of EU merger control without impairing the Merger Regulation's objective of preventing harmful effects on competition through concentrations?

- ☒ YES
☐ NO
☐ OTHER

If you replied yes or other, do you consider that there is scope for further simplification by, in particular:

8.1 Exempting one or several categories of the cases listed in question 2 above (and/or any other categories of cases) from the obligation of prior notification to the Commission and from the standstill obligation; in those cases, the Commission would not adopt a decision under the Merger Regulation;

- ☒ YES
☐ NO

Please explain.

As suggested in the 2014 White Paper, the Commission could be empowered to exempt from notification certain categories of transactions that normally do not raise any competition concerns (such as those transactions which do not involve any horizontal or vertical relationships between the merging undertakings and are currently dealt with under a simplified procedure) from mandatory prior notification.

8.2 Introducing lighter information requirements for certain categories of cases listed in question 2 above (and/or any other categories of cases), notably by replacing the notification form by an initial short information notice; on the basis of this information, the Commission would decide whether or not to examine the case (if the Commission does not to examine the case, no notification would need to be filed and the Commission would not adopt a decision);

- ☒ YES
☐ NO

Please explain.

The notification form would be replaced by an initial short form information notice, on the basis of which the Commission would decide whether to examine the case. The Commission should, however, reserve the right to request further information or additional documents to aid their decision making.

8.3 Introducing a self-assessment system for certain categories of cases listed in question 2 above (and/or any other categories of cases); under such system, merging parties would decide whether or not to proceed to notify a transaction, but the Commission would have the possibility to start an investigation on its own initiative or further to a complaint in those cases where it considers it appropriate in so far as they may potentially raise competition concerns;

- ☐ YES
☒ NO

Please explain.

A self-assessment, by its very nature, is subjective and uncertain. On the one hand, wrongly assessed or mischaracterised transactions may be detrimental to consumers and lead to competition concerns. On the other, for parties to the transaction, it could create much uncertainty where the Commission ex ante decides to intervene against a transaction which has already been implemented. From the perspective of the Commission, it is administratively difficult to keep track of all mergers that could potentially raise competition concerns.

8.4 Other

- ☒ YES
☐ NO

Please explain.

The Notice, in paragraph 26, states that the “Commission will endeavour to issue a short-form decision as soon as practicable following the expiry of the 15 working day period during which Member States may request referral of a notified concentration pursuant to Article 9 of the Merger Regulation.”

This timeline of 15 working days is framed in the language of a best efforts guideline, rather than being prescriptive. There would have been greater value added for businesses were these timelines were to be prescriptive, such that the parties to a transaction could rely definitively on when they would hear back from the Commission.

When replying to question 8, please take into account the benefits and potential risks involved in each particular measure. For example, by exempting from notification all cases without horizontal or vertical overlaps [see point (8.1) above], the Commission may not be able to examine certain concentrations that could raise competition concerns, for instance because of potential competition or conglomerate aspects. Conversely, in cases where Parties file only a short information notice [see point (8.2) above], the Commission may not have sufficient information to assess whether the merger should be examined because it could potentially raise competition concerns. Similarly, in a self-assessment system [see point (8.3) above], the Commission may not become aware of mergers that could potentially raise competition concerns; moreover, under such system, the Commission may decide to intervene against a transaction which has already been implemented, which may cause some businesses to notify in any event just to obtain legal certainty.

In case you identify any risks, please explain those and indicate whether you envisage any measure to address / mitigate such risks.

The risk regarding point 8.2 is that the Commission may not have sufficient information to assess whether the merger should be examined in cases where parties only file a short information notice. However, this could be mitigated by providing the Commission the right to request further information or additional documents to aid their decision making.

Further simplification of the treatment of extra-EEA joint ventures

9. The creation of joint ventures operating outside the EEA and having no effect on competition on markets within the EEA ("extra-EEA joint ventures") can be subject to review by the European Commission. In your experience, has this fact contributed to protecting competition and consumers in Europe?

- ☐ YES
- ☒ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain

10. Has this one stop shop review at EU level of extra-EEA joint ventures created added value for businesses and consumers?

- ☐ YES
☒ NO
☐ OTHER

Please explain

11. Do you consider that the costs (in terms of workload and resources spent) incurred by businesses when notifying extra-EEA joint ventures are adequate and proportionate in order to ensure an appropriate review of concentrations with an EU dimension in order to prevent harmful effects on competition in the EEA?

- ☐ YES
☒ NO
☐ OTHER

Please explain

12. To which extent have such costs been reduced by the 2013 Simplification Package? Please explain.

Costs have been reduced significantly by the 2013 Simplification Package. Nonetheless, there are scopes for further reduction, as discussed in the response to Question 7 above.

13. On the basis of your experience on the functioning of the Merger Regulation, particularly after the changes introduced with the 2013 Simplification Package, do you consider that the treatment of extra-EEA joint ventures is sufficiently simplified and proportionate in view of the Merger Regulation's objective of preventing harmful effects on competition through concentrations or is there scope for further simplification?

- ☐ The treatment of extra-EEA joint ventures is sufficiently simplified.
☒ There is scope for further simplification.

Further simplification could be realised by:

(i) Excluding extra-EEA joint ventures from the scope of the Merger Regulation;

- ☒ YES
☐ NO

Please explain your answer taking into account both the scope for cost-savings and the potential risk that the Commission may not have the possibility to examine joint ventures that may impact competition in the EEA in the future (for instance if the scope of activity of the joint venture is expanded at a later stage). Also consider the possibility that these transactions may be subject to control in one or several EU Member States. In case you identify any risks, please indicate whether you envisage any measure to address / dispel such risks.

Excluding extra-EEA joint ventures from the scope of the Merger Regulations will mean saving of cost, time and administrative burden for both the parties and the Commission. Since these are full-function joint ventures located and operating totally outside the EEA (and which would not have any impact on markets within the EEA), the hurdles involved in addressing the concern of protecting EEA consumers are not justified.

We encourage the Commission's initiative in the 2014 White Paper to explore ways to eliminate the redundant filing requirements that presently arise for transactions having no conceivable nexus with the EU. Nonetheless, we request that the Commission encourages the Member States to adopt a consistent approach with that of the EU on the treatment of joint ventures with no effect on national Member States. Whilst filings may not need to be made at the European Commission level, the new system may mean that parties have to make filings at national level which could be equally or (in the absence of the one-stop shop under the EU Merger Regulation) more burdensome.

(ii) Introducing, for the treatment of extra-EEA joint ventures, an exemption from notification, or a light information system, or a self-assessment or any other system?

- ☐ YES
☐ NO

Please explain your answer, taking into account both the scope for cost-savings and any potential risk. In case you identify any risks, please indicate whether you envisage any measure to address/ dispel such risks.

(iii) Other.

Please explain.

IV.2. Jurisdictional thresholds

The Merger Regulation only applies to concentrations of a Union dimension, which are those where the undertakings concerned meet the different relevant turnover thresholds set out in Article 1 of the Merger Regulation.

Article 1 of the Merger Regulation

Scope

1. Without prejudice to Article 4(5) and Article 22, this Regulation shall apply to all concentrations with a Union dimension as defined in this Article.

2. A concentration has a Union dimension where:

(a) the combined aggregate worldwide turnover of all the undertakings concerned is more than EUR 5 000 million; and

(b) the aggregate Union-wide turnover of each of at least two of the undertakings concerned is more than EUR 250 million,

unless each of the undertakings concerned achieves more than two-thirds of its aggregate Union-wide turnover within one and the same Member State.

3. A concentration that does not meet the thresholds laid down in paragraph 2 has a Union dimension where:

(a) the combined aggregate worldwide turnover of all the undertakings concerned is more than EUR 2 500 million;

(b) in each of at least three Member States, the combined aggregate turnover of all the undertakings concerned is more than EUR 100 million;

(c) in each of at least three Member States included for the purpose of point (b), the aggregate turnover of each of at least two of the undertakings concerned is more than EUR 25 million; and

(d) the aggregate Union-wide turnover of each of at least two of the undertakings concerned is more than EUR 100 million,

unless each of the undertakings concerned achieves more than two-thirds of its aggregate Union-wide turnover within one and the same Member State.

4. [...]

5. [...]

Recently, a debate has emerged on the effectiveness of these turnover-based jurisdictional thresholds, specifically on whether they allow capturing all transactions which can potentially have an impact on the internal market. This may be particularly significant in the digital economy, where services are regularly launched to build up a significant user base before a business model is determined that would result in significant revenues. With significant numbers of users, these services may play a competitive role. Moreover, relevant business models may involve collecting and analysing large inventories of data that do not yet generate significant turnover (at least in an initial period). Therefore, players in the digital economy may have considerable actual or potential market impact that may be reflected in high acquisition values, although they may not yet generate any or only little turnover. Acquisitions of such companies with no substantial turnover are likely not captured under the current turnover-based thresholds triggering a notification under the EU Merger Regulation, even in cases where the acquired company already plays a competitive role, holds commercially valuable data, or has a considerable market potential for other reasons. It has been suggested to complement the existing turnover-based jurisdictional thresholds of the EU Merger Regulation by additional notification requirements based on alternative criteria, such as the transaction value. The perceived legal gap may not only concern the digital industry, but also other industry sectors, such as the pharmaceutical industry. There have been indeed a number of highly valued acquisitions, by major pharmaceutical companies, of small biotechnology companies, which predominantly research and develop new treatments that may have high commercial potential, and do not yet generate any or only little turnover.

Moreover, the question of whether there is a legal gap needs to be assessed in the context of the case referral system in EU merger control. Even in instances where a merger does not have Union dimension based on the turnover of the merging parties, the Commission may obtain jurisdiction through a referral. According to Article 4(5) of the Merger Regulation, the parties to a merger may ask for referral of a case from the level of Member States to the Commission before it is notified, if the case is notifiable under the national merger control laws in at least three Member States and if the additional criteria set out in Article 4(5) of the Merger Regulation are met. Also, according to Article 22 of the Merger Regulation, national competition authorities may request the referral of a case to the Commission after notification, if the specific conditions of Article 22 of the Merger Regulation are met.

This section of the questionnaire gathers your views on the existence of a possible enforcement gap of EU merger control, and what would be its possible dimension and relevance. Moreover, this section also requests your views on possible policy responses, if such were to be warranted.

14. In your experience, have you encountered competitively significant transactions **in the digital economy in the past 5 years** which had a cross-border effect in the EEA but were not captured by the current turnover thresholds set out in Article 1 of the Merger Regulation and thus fell outside the Commission's jurisdiction? [1]

[1] A well-known example of these transactions is the acquisition in 2014 of WhatsApp by Facebook, which fell outside the thresholds of Article 1 of the Merger Regulation but was ultimately referred to the Commission pursuant to Article 4(5) thereof. Information on merger cases reviewed by the European Commission is accessible via the search function on DG COMP's website at http://ec.europa.eu/competition/elojade/isef/index.cfm?clear=1&policy_area_id=2.

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

- **If yes**, please describe the characteristics of such transactions.

- **If yes**, please give concrete examples.

- **If yes**, please estimate how many of those transactions take place per year.

- **If yes**, do you consider that those transactions would typically qualify for a pre-notification referral under Article 4(5) of the Merger Regulation or a post-notification referral under Article 22 of the Merger Regulation? Please explain.

- **If no or other**, please explain your answer.

15. In your experience, have you encountered competitively significant transactions **in the pharmaceutical industry in the past 5 years** which had a cross-border effect in the EEA but were not captured by the current turnover thresholds set out in Article 1 of the Merger Regulation and thus fell outside the Commission's jurisdiction? [1]

[1] An example of such transactions is the 2015 acquisition of Pharmacyclis by AbbVie.

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

- **If yes**, please describe the characteristics of such transactions.

- **If yes**, please give concrete examples.

- **If yes**, please estimate how many of those transactions take place per year.

- **If yes**, do you consider that those transactions would typically qualify for a pre-notification referral under Article 4(5) of the Merger Regulation or a post-notification referral under Article 22 of the Merger Regulation? Please explain.

- **If no or other**, please explain your answer.

16. In your experience, have you encountered competitively significant transactions **in other industries than the digital and pharmaceutical sectors in the past 5 years** which had a cross-border effect in the EEA but were not captured by the current turnover thresholds set out in Article 1 of the Merger Regulation?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

- **If yes**, please describe the characteristics of such transactions.

- **If yes**, please give concrete examples.

- **If yes**, please estimate how many of those transactions take place per year.

- **If yes**, do you consider that those transactions would typically qualify for a pre-notification referral under Article 4(5) of the Merger Regulation or a post-notification referral under Article 22 of the Merger Regulation? Please explain.

- **If no or other**, please explain your answer.

17. In your experience and in light of your responses to the previous questions (14 to 16), are the possible shortcomings of the current turnover-based jurisdictional thresholds of Article 1 of the Merger Regulation (in terms of possibly not capturing all competitively significant transactions having a cross-border effect in the EEA) sufficiently addressed by the current case referral system (including the pre-notification referrals to the Commission under Article 4(5) of the Merger Regulation and the post-notification referral to the Commission under Article 22 of the Merger Regulation)?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain.

18. Do you consider that the current absence, in the Merger Regulation, of complementary jurisdictional criteria (i.e. criteria not based exclusively on the turnover of the undertakings concerned) impairs the goal of ensuring that all competitively significant transactions with a cross-border effect in the EEA are subject to merger control at EU level?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

- **If yes**, please also indicate which are, in your opinion, the complementary jurisdictional criteria whose absence may impair the above-mentioned goal. Please also take into account, in your reply, the Commission's objective of not imposing undue burdens on businesses.

- **If no or other**, please explain.

19. In particular, do you consider that the current absence, in the Merger Regulation, of a complementary jurisdictional threshold based on the value of the transaction ("deal size threshold") impairs the goal of ensuring that all competitively significant transactions with a cross-border effect in the EEA are subject to merger control at EU level?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain.

20. If you replied yes to question 19, which level of transaction value would you consider to be appropriate for a deal size threshold? Please explain your answer.

21. If you replied yes to question 19, what solutions do you consider appropriate to ensure that only transactions that have a significant economic link with the EEA ("local nexus") would be covered by such a complementary threshold? In responding, please consider that the purpose of this deal size threshold would be to capture acquisitions of highly valued target companies that do not (yet) generate any substantial turnover.

- ☐ A general clause stipulating that concentrations which meet the deal size threshold are only notifiable if they are likely to produce a measurable impact within the EEA, complemented by specific explanatory guidance.
- ☐ Industry specific criteria to ensure a local nexus.
- ☐ Other

Please explain your response and provide examples where appropriate.

22. If you replied yes to question 19, would you see a need for additional criteria limiting the scope of application of this deal size threshold in order to ensure a smooth and cost-effective system of EU merger control?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain your answer.

IV.3. Referrals

The division of competence between the Commission and the EU Member States is based on the application of the turnover thresholds set out in Article 1 of the Merger Regulation and includes three corrective mechanisms.

The first corrective mechanism is the so-called "two-thirds rule". Pursuant to this rule, notification under the Merger Regulation is not required if each of the parties concerned realises more than two thirds of its EU-wide turnover in one and the same Member State, even if the general thresholds under Articles 1(2) and 1(3) of the Merger Regulation are met. The objective of this rule is to exclude from the Commission's jurisdiction certain cases which contain a clear national nexus to one Member State.

The second corrective mechanism is the pre-notification referral system introduced in 2004. This mechanism allows for the re-allocation of jurisdiction to the Member States under Article 4(4) of the Merger Regulation or to the Commission under Article 4(5) if certain conditions are fulfilled. The initiative for requesting such a referral prior to notification lies in the hands of the parties. However, pre-notification referrals are subject to approval by the Member States and the Commission under Article 4(4) and by the Member States under Article 4(5) of the Merger Regulation.

The third corrective mechanism is the post-notification referral system whereby one or more Member States can request that the Commission assess mergers that fall below the thresholds of the Merger Regulation under certain conditions (Article 22 of the Merger Regulation). Conversely, a Member State may, in cases that have been notified under the Merger Regulation, request the transfer of competence to the national competition authorities under certain conditions (Article 9 of the Merger Regulation).

In relation to the current case referral mechanism foreseen by the Merger Regulation, the White Paper proposals aimed at making case referrals between Member States and the Commission more business-friendly and effective.

Those proposals essentially consist of:

1. Abolishing the two step procedure under Article 4(5) of the Merger Regulation, which requires that parties first file a Form RS and then the Form CO, if they would like the Commission to deal with a case that is notifiable in at least three Member States, but does not meet the jurisdictional thresholds of the Merger Regulation;
2. Specific modifications concerning the post-notification referrals from Member States to the Commission under Article 22 of the Merger Regulation, namely
 - an expansion of the Commission's jurisdiction to the entire EEA if it accepts a referral request under Article 22 of the Merger Regulation (currently the Commission only obtains jurisdiction in those Member States that join the referral request),
 - and a renouncement of jurisdiction over the entire EEA, if one or several Member States oppose the referral request, and

3. The removal of the requirement under Article 4(4) of the Merger Regulation pursuant to which parties have to assert that the transaction may "significantly affect competition in a market" in order for a case to qualify for a referral. Showing that the transaction is likely to have its main impact in a distinct market in the Member State in question would suffice. Removing the perceived "element of self-incrimination" may lead to an increase in the number of Article 4(4) requests.

23. Do you consider that the current case referral mechanism (i.e. Articles 4(4), 4(5), 9, and 22 of the Merger Regulation) contributes to allocating merger cases to the more appropriate competition authority without placing unnecessary burden on businesses?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain.

24. If you consider that the current system is not optimal, do you consider that the proposals made by the White Paper would contribute to better allocating merger cases to the more appropriate competition authority and/or reducing burden on businesses?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain.

25. Do you consider that there is scope to make the referral system (i.e. Articles 4(4), 4(5), 9, and 22 of the Merger Regulation) even more business friendly and effective, beyond the White Paper's proposals?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain.

IV.4. Technical aspects

The 2014 Commission Staff Working Document (2014 SWD) accompanying the White Paper identified additional technical aspects of the procedural and investigative framework for the assessment of mergers where experience has shown that improvement may be possible. The SWD included the following proposals:

- Modifying Article 4(1) of the Merger Regulation in order to provide more flexibility for the notification of mergers that are executed through share acquisitions on a stock exchange without a public takeover bid.
- Amending Article 5(4) of the Merger Regulation to clarify the methodology for turnover calculation of joint ventures.
- Introducing additional flexibility regarding the investigation time limits, in particular in Phase II merger cases.
- Modifying Article 8(4) of the Merger Regulation to align the scope of the Commission's power to require dissolution of partially implemented transactions incompatible with the internal market with the scope of the suspension obligation (Article 7(4) of the Merger Regulation).
- Tailoring the scope of Article 5(2)(2) to capture only cases of real circumvention of the EU merger control rules by artificially dividing transactions and to address the situation where the first transaction was notified and cleared by a national competition authority.
- Clarification that "parking transactions" should be assessed as part of the acquisition of control by the ultimate acquirer.
- Amending the Merger Regulation to allow appropriate sanctions against parties and third parties that receive access to non-public commercial information about other undertakings for the exclusive purpose of the proceeding but disclose it or use it for other purposes.
- Amending the Merger Regulation to clarify that referral decisions based on deceit or false information, for which one of the parties is responsible, can also be revoked.

26. Do you consider that there is currently scope to improve the EU merger control system and that each of the proposals contained in the 2014 SWD would contribute to achieving this purpose?

27. Based on your experience, are there any other possible shortcomings of a technical nature in the current Merger Regulation? Do you have any suggestions to address the shortcomings you identified?

28. One of the proposals contained in the 2014 SWD relates to the possibility of introducing additional flexibility regarding the investigation time limits. In this regard, have you experienced any particularly significant time constraints during a Phase 2 merger investigation, in particular in those cases where a Statement of Objections had been adopted (for example, for remedy discussions following the adoption of the Statement of Objections)?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please consider, inter alia, the time needed for the Commission to carry out its investigation and for the notifying parties to make legal and economic submissions, exercise their rights of defence and to propose and discuss commitments.

29. In the light of your reply to question 28 above, do you consider that the current distinction between remedies presented before or after working day 55 since the opening of phase II proceedings, on which depends the extension of the procedure by 15 additional working days, is working well in practice?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ OTHER

Please explain.

V. Submission of additional information

Please feel free to upload a concise document, such as a position paper, explaining your views in more detail or including additional information and data. The maximal file size is 1MB. Please note that the uploaded document will be published alongside your response to the questionnaire which is the essential input to this open public consultation. The document is an optional complement and serves as additional background reading to better understand your position.

Contact

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