

Public questionnaire for the 2019 Evaluation of the Research & Development and Specialisation Block Exemption Regulations

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

1

Introduction

Background and aim of the public questionnaire

Article 101(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union ('the Treaty') prohibits agreements between undertakings that restrict competition unless they generate efficiencies in line with Article 101(3) of the Treaty. Agreements generate efficiencies in line with Article 101(3) of the Treaty if they contribute to improving the production or distribution of goods or services, or to promoting technical or economic progress, while allowing consumers a fair share of the resulting benefits; they only impose restrictions that are indispensable for the attainment of these objectives and do not eliminate competition in respect of a substantial part of the product in question. The prohibition contained in Article 101(1) of the Treaty covers, amongst others, agreements entered into between actual or potential competitors (so-called 'horizontal agreements').

Commission Regulations (EU) No 1217/2010 (Research & Development Block Exemption Regulation - 'R&D BER') and 1218/2010 (Specialisation Block Exemption Regulation - 'Specialisation BER'), together referred to as the 'Horizontal block exemption regulations' (or 'HBERs'), exempt from the prohibition contained in Article 101(1) of the Treaty those R&D and specialisation agreements for which it can be assumed with sufficient certainty that they satisfy the conditions of Article 101(3) of the Treaty. The Commission Guidelines on horizontal cooperation agreements ('HGL') provide binding guidance on the Commission for the interpretation of the HBERs and for the application of Article 101 of the Treaty to other horizontal agreements. The HBERs will expire on 31 December 2022.

This public questionnaire represents one of the methods of information gathering in the evaluation of the HBERs, together with the HGL, which was launched on 5 September 2019. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect views and evidence from the public and stakeholders on how the current rules work for them. The Commission will evaluate the current HBERs, together with the HGL, based on the following criteria:

- Effectiveness (Have the objectives been met?),
- Efficiency (Were the costs involved proportionate to the benefits?),
- Relevance (Do the objectives still match current needs or problems?),
- Coherence (Does the policy complement other actions or are there contradictions?), and
- EU added value (Did EU action provide clear added value?).

The collected information will provide part of the evidence base for determining whether the Commission should let the HBERs lapse, prolong their duration without changing them or prolong them in a revised form, together with the accompanying HGL.

The responses to this public consultation will be analysed and the summary of the main points and conclusions will be made public on the Commission's central public consultations page. **Please note that your replies will also become public as a whole, see below under Section 'Privacy and Confidentiality'.**

Nothing in this questionnaire may be interpreted as stating an official position of the Commission.

Submission of your contribution

You are invited to reply to this public consultation by answering the questionnaire online. To facilitate the analysis of your replies, we would kindly ask you to keep your answers concise and to the point. You may include documents and URLs for relevant online content in your replies.

While the questionnaire contains several questions of a more general nature, notably Section 4 and 5 also contain questions that are aimed at respondents with more specialised knowledge of the HBERs and HGL. We invite all respondents to provide answers to the questionnaire. In case a question does not apply to you or you do not know the answer, please choose the field 'Do not know' or 'Not applicable'.

For your information, you have the option of saving your questionnaire as a 'draft' and finalising your response later. In order to do this you have to click on 'Save as Draft' and save the new link that you will receive from the EUSurvey tool on your computer. Please note that without this new link you will not be able to access the draft again.

The questionnaire is available in English, French and German. You may however respond in any EU language.

In case of questions, you can contact us via the following functional mailbox: COMP-HBERS-REVIEW@ec.europa.eu.

In case of technical problem, please contact the Commission's [CENTRAL HELPDESK](#).

Duration of the consultation

The consultation on this questionnaire will be open for 14 weeks, from 6/11/2019 to 12/2/2020.

Privacy and confidentiality

*** 1.1 Publication privacy settings**

The Commission will publish the responses to this public consultation. You can choose whether you would like your details to be made public or to remain anonymous.

☒ **Anonymous**

Only your type of respondent, country of origin and contribution will be published. All other personal details (name, organisation name and size, transparency register number) will not be published.

☒ **Public**

Your personal details (name, organisation name and size, transparency register number, country of origin) will be published with your contribution.

Please note that your replies and any attachments you may submit will be published in their entirety even if you chose 'Anonymous'. Therefore, please remove from your contribution any information that you will not want to be published.

☒ 1.2 I agree with the [personal data protection provisions](#)

2 About you

* 2.1 Language of my contribution

- ☐ Bulgarian
- ☐ Croatian
- ☐ Czech
- ☐ Danish
- ☐ Dutch
- ☒ English
- ☐ Estonian
- ☐ Finnish
- ☐ French
- ☐ Gaelic
- ☐ German
- ☐ Greek
- ☐ Hungarian
- ☐ Italian
- ☐ Latvian
- ☐ Lithuanian
- ☐ Maltese
- ☐ Polish
- ☐ Portuguese
- ☐ Romanian
- ☐ Slovak
- ☐ Slovenian
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Swedish

* 2.2 First name

Razvan

* 2.3 Surname

Antemir

* 2.4 Email (this won't be published)

* 2.5 I am giving my contribution as

- ☐ Academic/research institution
- ☒ Business association
- ☐ Company/business organisation
- ☐ Consumer organisation
- ☐ EU citizen
- ☐ Environmental organisation
- ☐ Non-EU citizen
- ☐ Non-governmental organisation (NGO)
- ☐ Public authority
- ☐ Trade union
- ☐ Other

2.6 Other - please specify

If you chose "Other", please specify whether you are contributing as lawyer/law firm, economic consultancy or something else:

* 2.7 Organisation name

255 character(s) maximum

AIM EUropean BRands Association

If available, please provide your ID number of the [EU Transparency Register](#). If your organisation is not registered, we invite you to register, although it is not compulsory to be registered to reply to this consultation.

2.8 Transparency register number

255 character(s) maximum

Check if your organisation is on the [transparency register](#). It's a voluntary database for organisations seeking to influence EU decision-making.

1074382679-01

* 2.10 Organisation size

- ☒ Micro (1 to 9 employees)
- ☐ Small (10 to 49 employees)
- ☐ Medium (50 to 249 employees)
- ☐ Large (250 or more)

* 2.11 The main activities of your organisation:

Text of 1 to 250 characters will be accepted

AIM is the European Brands Association. It represents brand manufacturers in Europe on key issues which affect their ability to design, distribute and market their brands.

*** 2.12 Please describe the sectors where your organisation or your members are conducting business:**

Text of 1 to 250 characters will be accepted

Manufacturing of branded products

*** 2.15 Country of origin**

Please add your country of origin, or that of your organisation.

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Afghanistan | <input type="radio"/> Djibouti | <input type="radio"/> Libya | <input type="radio"/> Saint Martin |
| <input type="radio"/> Åland Islands | <input type="radio"/> Dominica | <input type="radio"/> Liechtenstein | <input type="radio"/> Saint Pierre and Miquelon |
| <input type="radio"/> Albania | <input type="radio"/> Dominican Republic | <input type="radio"/> Lithuania | <input type="radio"/> Saint Vincent and the Grenadines |
| <input type="radio"/> Algeria | <input type="radio"/> Ecuador | <input type="radio"/> Luxembourg | <input type="radio"/> Samoa |
| <input type="radio"/> American Samoa | <input type="radio"/> Egypt | <input type="radio"/> Macau | <input type="radio"/> San Marino |
| <input type="radio"/> Andorra | <input type="radio"/> El Salvador | <input type="radio"/> Madagascar | <input type="radio"/> São Tomé and Príncipe |
| <input type="radio"/> Angola | <input type="radio"/> Equatorial Guinea | <input type="radio"/> Malawi | <input type="radio"/> Saudi Arabia |
| <input type="radio"/> Anguilla | <input type="radio"/> Eritrea | <input type="radio"/> Malaysia | <input type="radio"/> Senegal |
| <input type="radio"/> Antarctica | <input type="radio"/> Estonia | <input type="radio"/> Maldives | <input type="radio"/> Serbia |
| <input type="radio"/> Antigua and Barbuda | <input type="radio"/> Eswatini | <input type="radio"/> Mali | <input type="radio"/> Seychelles |
| <input type="radio"/> Argentina | <input type="radio"/> Ethiopia | <input type="radio"/> Malta | <input type="radio"/> Sierra Leone |
| <input type="radio"/> Armenia | <input type="radio"/> Falkland Islands | <input type="radio"/> Marshall Islands | <input type="radio"/> Singapore |
| <input type="radio"/> Aruba | <input type="radio"/> Faroe Islands | <input type="radio"/> Martinique | <input type="radio"/> Sint Maarten |
| <input type="radio"/> Australia | <input type="radio"/> Fiji | <input type="radio"/> Mauritania | <input type="radio"/> Slovakia |
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| <input type="radio"/> Azerbaijan | <input type="radio"/> France | <input type="radio"/> Mayotte | <input type="radio"/> Solomon Islands |
| <input type="radio"/> Bahamas | <input type="radio"/> French Guiana | <input type="radio"/> Mexico | <input type="radio"/> Somalia |
| <input type="radio"/> Bahrain | <input type="radio"/> French Polynesia | <input type="radio"/> Micronesia | <input type="radio"/> South Africa |
| <input type="radio"/> Bangladesh | <input type="radio"/> French Southern and Antarctic Lands | <input type="radio"/> Moldova | <input type="radio"/> South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands |

- ☐ Barbados
- ☐ Belarus
- ☒ Belgium
- ☐ Belize
- ☐ Benin
- ☐ Bermuda
- ☐ Bhutan
- ☐ Bolivia
- ☐ Bonaire Saint Eustatius and Saba
- ☐ Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ☐ Botswana
- ☐ Bouvet Island
- ☐ Brazil
- ☐ British Indian Ocean Territory
- ☐ British Virgin Islands
- ☐ Brunei
- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Burkina Faso
- ☐ Burundi
- ☐ Cambodia
- ☐ Cameroon
- ☐ Canada
- ☐ Cape Verde
- ☐ Cayman Islands
- ☐ Central African Republic
- ☐ Chad
- ☐ Chile
- ☐ China
- ☐ Christmas Island
- ☐ Clipperton
- ☐ Cocos (Keeling) Islands
- ☐ Gabon
- ☐ Georgia
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Ghana
- ☐ Gibraltar
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Greenland
- ☐ Grenada
- ☐ Guadeloupe
- ☐ Guam
- ☐ Guatemala
- ☐ Guernsey
- ☐ Guinea
- ☐ Guinea-Bissau
- ☐ Guyana
- ☐ Haiti
- ☐ Heard Island and McDonald Islands
- ☐ Honduras
- ☐ Hong Kong
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Iceland
- ☐ India
- ☐ Indonesia
- ☐ Iran
- ☐ Iraq
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Isle of Man
- ☐ Israel
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Jamaica
- ☐ Japan
- ☐ Monaco
- ☐ Mongolia
- ☐ Montenegro
- ☐ Montserrat
- ☐ Morocco
- ☐ Mozambique
- ☐ Myanmar /Burma
- ☐ Namibia
- ☐ Nauru
- ☐ Nepal
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ New Caledonia
- ☐ New Zealand
- ☐ Nicaragua
- ☐ Niger
- ☐ Nigeria
- ☐ Niue
- ☐ Norfolk Island
- ☐ Northern Mariana Islands
- ☐ North Korea
- ☐ North Macedonia
- ☐ Norway
- ☐ Oman
- ☐ Pakistan
- ☐ Palau
- ☐ Palestine
- ☐ Panama
- ☐ Papua New Guinea
- ☐ Paraguay
- ☐ Peru
- ☐ Philippines
- ☐ South Korea
- ☐ South Sudan
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sri Lanka
- ☐ Sudan
- ☐ Suriname
- ☐ Svalbard and Jan Mayen
- ☐ Sweden
- ☐ Switzerland
- ☐ Syria
- ☐ Taiwan
- ☐ Tajikistan
- ☐ Tanzania
- ☐ Thailand
- ☐ The Gambia
- ☐ Timor-Leste
- ☐ Togo
- ☐ Tokelau
- ☐ Tonga
- ☐ Trinidad and Tobago
- ☐ Tunisia
- ☐ Turkey
- ☐ Turkmenistan
- ☐ Turks and Caicos Islands
- ☐ Tuvalu
- ☐ Uganda
- ☐ Ukraine
- ☐ United Arab Emirates
- ☐ United Kingdom
- ☐ United States
- ☐ United States Minor Outlying Islands

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| <input type="radio"/> Colombia | <input type="radio"/> Jersey | <input type="radio"/> Pitcairn Islands | <input type="radio"/> Uruguay |
| <input type="radio"/> Comoros | <input type="radio"/> Jordan | <input type="radio"/> Poland | <input type="radio"/> US Virgin Islands |
| <input type="radio"/> Congo | <input type="radio"/> Kazakhstan | <input type="radio"/> Portugal | <input type="radio"/> Uzbekistan |
| <input type="radio"/> Cook Islands | <input type="radio"/> Kenya | <input type="radio"/> Puerto Rico | <input type="radio"/> Vanuatu |
| <input type="radio"/> Costa Rica | <input type="radio"/> Kiribati | <input type="radio"/> Qatar | <input type="radio"/> Vatican City |
| <input type="radio"/> Côte d'Ivoire | <input type="radio"/> Kosovo | <input type="radio"/> Réunion | <input type="radio"/> Venezuela |
| <input type="radio"/> Croatia | <input type="radio"/> Kuwait | <input type="radio"/> Romania | <input type="radio"/> Vietnam |
| <input type="radio"/> Cuba | <input type="radio"/> Kyrgyzstan | <input type="radio"/> Russia | <input type="radio"/> Wallis and Futuna |
| <input type="radio"/> Curaçao | <input type="radio"/> Laos | <input type="radio"/> Rwanda | <input type="radio"/> Western Sahara |
| <input type="radio"/> Cyprus | <input type="radio"/> Latvia | <input type="radio"/> Saint Barthélemy | <input type="radio"/> Yemen |
| <input type="radio"/> Czechia | <input type="radio"/> Lebanon | <input type="radio"/> Saint Helena Ascension and Tristan da Cunha | <input type="radio"/> Zambia |
| <input type="radio"/> Democratic Republic of the Congo | <input type="radio"/> Lesotho | <input type="radio"/> Saint Kitts and Nevis | <input type="radio"/> Zimbabwe |
| <input type="radio"/> Denmark | <input type="radio"/> Liberia | <input type="radio"/> Saint Lucia | |

3 General Questions on the Horizontal Block Exemption Regulations and the Guidelines on horizontal cooperation agreements

* 3.6 How often do you consult the **R&D BER** for guidance on a horizontal cooperation agreement?

- ☐ Frequently (several times per year)
- ☐ Occasionally (once or twice per year)
- ☒ Never

* 3.7 How often do you consult the **Specialisation BER** for guidance on a horizontal cooperation agreement?

- ☐ Frequently (several times per year)
- ☐ Occasionally (once or twice per year)
- ☒ Never

* 3.8 How often do you consult the **HGL** for guidance on a horizontal cooperation agreement?

- ☐ Frequently (several times per year)
- ☐ Occasionally (once or twice per year)
- ☒ Never

4 Effectiveness (Have the objectives of the current HBERs and HGL been met?)

In this section, we would like to have your opinion on the extent to which the HBERs and the HGL have met their objectives.

The **purpose of the EU competition rules** is to ensure that competition is not distorted to the detriment of the public interest, individual undertakings and consumers. In line with this objective, the Commission's policy is to leave companies maximum flexibility when concluding horizontal co-operation agreements in order to increase the competitiveness of the European economy while at the same time promoting competition for the benefit of European businesses and consumers.

The **purpose of the HBERs and the HGL** is to make it easier for undertakings to cooperate in ways which are economically desirable and without adverse effect from the point of view of competition policy. The specific objectives of the HBERs and HGL are to ensure effective protection of competition and providing adequate legal certainty for undertakings.

* 4.1 In your view, do you perceive that the HBERs and the HGL have contributed to promoting competition in the EU?

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ Yes, but they have contributed only to a certain extent or only in specific sectors
- ☐ They were neutral
- ☐ No, they have negatively affected competition in the EU
- ☐ Don't know

* 4.2 Please explain your reply, distinguishing between sectors where relevant: (1500 characters max).

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

The Guidelines have to recognise long-term, broader benefits that result from joint competitors cooperation for sustainability which may not be necessarily economically quantifiable or consumer focus.

They do not address specific issues that can arise from information exchanges in a set of horizontal agreements, whether in relation to sustainability or certain buyer cooperation association which appeared, as grocery retail alliances.

Our focus is primarily on Section 5 which deal with cooperation among buyers. The Guidelines correctly identify a number of concerns that are raised by buyer cooperation. In particular, the Guidelines note that buyer cooperation can have an adverse impact both in the upstream market where suppliers compete and in the downstream market where buyers compete. Yet the analysis of these concerns in the Guidelines is not fully developed. Section 5 focuses mainly on concerns in the downstream market but does not elaborate on the possible concerns in the upstream market. It also does not elaborate on possible concerns from aggregation of buyer power through cooperation among buyers that do not compete downstream downstream as we will explain further and in our briefing paper.

Legal certainty provided by the HBERs and the HGL

* 4.3 In your view, have the R&D BER and Section 3 of the HGL on research and development agreements provided sufficient legal certainty on R&D agreements companies can conclude without the risk of infringing competition law?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

☒ Do not know

* 4.5 In your view, does the R&D BER increase legal certainty compared with a situation where the R&D BER would not exist but only the HGL applied?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Do not know

* 4.7 In your view, have the Specialisation BER and Section 4 of the HGL on production agreements provided sufficient legal certainty on production /specialisation agreements companies can conclude without the risk of infringing competition law?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Do not know

* 4.9 In your view, does the Specialisation BER increase legal certainty compared with a situation where the Specialisation BER would not exist but only the HGL applied?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☒ Do not know

In this section we would like to have your opinion on the extent to which the HGL have provided sufficient legal certainty on horizontal cooperation agreements companies can undertake without the risk of infringing competition law. Please specify your answer according to the different types of horizontal agreements.

* 4.11 In your view, have the HGL provided sufficient legal certainty on agreements involving **information exchange** in the sense of Section 2 of the HGL?

☐ Yes

☒ No

☐ Do not know

* 4.12 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

The recent investigations of retail grocery buying groups, retail alliances, by national competition authorities (France, Belgium, Italy, Czech) underscore the importance of Section 2 of the Guidelines and merit further clarifications for the application of Article 101 TFEU to retailers and retail buying groups, retail alliances.

The type of information that retailers or alliances are allowed to exchange remains unclear. To a significant extent, this will depend on the specific set of functions an alliance or group carries out. Buyer alliances vary from handling the entire process of supply contract negotiations and purchasing to those merely coordinating joint product listing decisions. New forms of retail alliances in the grocery space have developed at the European level that do not involve genuine integration of purchase operations. For such alliances, it is difficult to argue that they can exchange certain types of information, such as purchasing terms. In this given situation, such exchange would infringe Article 101(1), or would not benefit from exemption under Article 101 (3) .

* 4.13 In your view, have the HGL provided sufficient legal certainty on **purchasing agreements** in the sense of Section 5 of the HGL?

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Do not know

* 4.14 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Retailers are increasingly active in the sale of their own retailer brands and, therefore, act as both customers and competitors of manufacturer brands they purchase. This dual role should be addressed and rules clarified to ensure a level playing field & competitive markets. Section 5 makes clear that the aggregation of market power through buyer cooperation may have significant harmful effects yet does not substantiate it. It should reflect recent developments in the grocery retailer sector, reviewing new types of buyer cooperation where buyers do not purchase but set a collection fee mechanism blocking European markets access to suppliers. Such buyers groups purely aggregate their buyer power. They reduce economic and consumer surpluses. Buyer cooperation can have harmful effects on suppliers in the upstream market it needs to be substantiated. AIM suggests a review of the competition concerns on retail buyer cooperation on issues such as collective unjustified extraction of fees, collective delisting, anti competitive exchange of information, segmentation of the Single Market in view of recent decisions from national competition authorities, Section 5 suggests that cooperation among retailers that are not present downstream in the same national market is unlikely to raise competition concerns. Yet aggregation of market power on the buyer side can be achieved irrespective of whether cooperating buyers are downstream competitors.

* 4.15 In your view, have the HGL provided sufficient legal certainty on **commercialisation agreements** in the sense of Section 6 of the HGL

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Do not know

* 4.17 In your view, have the HGL provided sufficient legal certainty on **standardisation agreements** in the sense of Section 7 of the HGL

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Do not know

* 4.19 In your view, have the HGL provided sufficient legal certainty on **other types of horizontal cooperation agreements** that are currently not specifically addressed in the HGL (for example sustainability agreements)

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ No
- ☐ Do not know

* 4.20 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

The Guidelines analytical framework considers a classic model of buyer cooperation, where companies jointly purchase products and negotiating prices in the form of buying groups or cooperatives. The Guidelines however do not adequately reflect the emergence of the new forms of grocery alliances or buyer arrangements.

New forms of grocery retail alliances have developed at the European level that do not involve genuine integration of purchase operations. Participants do not buy together or set up common logistics solutions. A number of such grocery alliances exists across Europe today. Some offer “services” to suppliers. The Italian Competition authority in its grocery retail alliance investigation did raise a set of concerns with regard these retail alliances “services” as they might appear or offer an alignment on downstream markets of concern for competitive markets. Suppliers also express serious concerns and reserves as we explained in our paper. AIM suggests the Commission to take these developments into account in the revision of its Guidelines, in order to provide an adequate framework for the assessment of such arrangements. Both suppliers and retailers would benefit from more clarity provided on the legality of such arrangements. Without a fee’s genuine relation to the offered services, buyer arrangements are more likely to give rise to competition concerns and less likely to meet the requirements of Article 101(3).

* 4.21 In your view, are there other types of horizontal cooperation agreements outside those identified in the current HGL that should have been specifically addressed in order to increase legal certainty?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Do not know

* 4.22 If Yes, please list those types of agreements and explain your reasons

Text of 1 to 3000 characters will be accepted

Section 5 of the Guidelines focuses on genuine joint purchasing agreements, but does not discuss naked mechanisms for the aggregation of buyer power. These mechanisms involve collective agreement among participating buyers not to negotiate with suppliers unless suppliers pay access fees in return for the ability to enter into negotiations with individual retailers. Suppliers that do not agree to such access fees are made subject to collective delisting by all participating buyers.

These mechanisms beyond being apparent to a boycott, create additional burdens and costs for suppliers to access European countries and expose them to serious disruption and market distortions through collective delisting.

The dual role of retailer, off and online should also be addressed by the revision of the Guidelines. the Commission should take into account the effect that the growing retailer brands sales have on the retail industry. Retailers are increasingly active in the sale of their own retailer brands and, therefore, act as both customers and competitors of branded goods manufacturers. As pointed out by researches, the “dual aspect to brand/private label competition needs careful consideration when undertaking competitive assessments about behaviour and outcomes in FMCG markets.” . As such, “their relationship entails elements of both vertical competition (in the battle for profit share between successive stages of the supply chain) and horizontal competition (in the battle for market share at the product level) .

First, retailers active in retailer brands sales may demand excessive amounts of commercially sensitive information suppliers and use that information to their .Second, retailers engage in discriminatory treatment of branded goods compared to retailer brands products. For example, retailers may favor their retailer brands products through pricing, by increase the price gap between manufacturer brands and retailer brands equivalents. This conduct leads to be both (i) consumer price increases, and (ii) foreclosure of branded goods manufacturers. Third, the Commission should consider the restriction of competition in the context of tie-in of services. This practice is being investigated in the online sector (e.g., Amazon).This practice is pervasive in the FMCG sector: retailers and retailer alliances. These practices may restrict competition by compromising innovation, quality, and variety of products available to consumers.

Last, horizontal agreements for addressing sustainability solutions would benefit from a specific section as range through several HGL sections. Also, as today the rules seem that such cooperation is only allowed as so far it demonstrates consumer benefits which are economically quantifiable.We would argue that a long term , citizens society goods should be the criteria in this instance.

Identification of pro-competitive horizontal agreements

The R&D BER and the Specialisation BER set out a number of conditions that R&D and specialisation agreements need to meet in order to benefit from the block exemption. The HGL provide additional guidance on how to interpret these conditions. These conditions have been defined with the purpose to give exemption only to those agreements for which it can be assumed with sufficient certainty that they generate efficiencies that outweigh, in line with Article 101(3) of the Treaty, the harm caused by the restriction of competition.

Based on your experience, have the following provisions in the **R&D BER** allowed to correctly identify the horizontal cooperation agreements that are compliant with Article 101 of the Treaty?

*** 4.23 The list of definitions that apply for R&D agreements that can benefit from exemption in Article 1 of the R&D BER**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Do not know

- * 4.25 The conditions for exemption listed in Article 3 of the R&D BER, regarding, for instance, access to the final results of the R&D, access to pre-existing know-how and joint exploitation.
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☒ Do not know
- * 4.27 The absence of a market share threshold for non-competing undertakings, the market share threshold of 25% for competing undertakings and the application thereof provided for in Articles 4 and 7 of the R&D BER
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☒ Do not know
- * 4.29 The limits regarding the duration of the exemption provided for in Article 4
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☒ Do not know
- * 4.31 The list identified in Article 5 of the R&D BER which make the exemption not available for agreements that have as their object certain restrictions or limitations ('hardcore restrictions')
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☒ Do not know
- * 4.33 The list of obligations included in agreements to which the exemption does not apply ('excluded restrictions'), identified in Article 6 of the R&D BER
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☒ Do not know

Based on your experience, have the following provisions in the **Specialisation BER** allowed to correctly identify the horizontal cooperation agreements that are compliant with Article 101 of the Treaty?

- * 4.35 The definitions that apply for the purposes of the Specialisation BER, in Article 1
 - ☒ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Do not know
- * 4.37 The explanations on the type of specialisation agreements to which the exemption applies, provided by Article 2 of the Specialisation BER
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☒ Do not know

* 4.39 The market share threshold of 20% and its application, provided for in Articles 3 and 5 of the Specialisation BER

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☒ Do not know

* 4.41 The list identified in Article 4 of the Specialisation BER which make the exemption not available for agreements that have as their object price fixing, certain limitations of output or sales or market or customer allocation ('hardcore restrictions')

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☒ Do not know

4.43 Based on your experience, are there other elements, besides those listed in the previous questions that should have been clarified, added, or removed to improve the guidance given by the BERs?

Text of 1 to 3000 characters will be accepted

* 4.44 Based on your experience, are there other types of horizontal cooperation agreements outside those identified in the R&D and Specialisation BERs which would satisfy the conditions of Article 101(3) of the Treaty?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☒ Do not know

* 4.46 Based on your experience, have the BERs and the HGL had any impacts that were not expected or not intended?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☒ Do not know

5 Efficiency (were the costs involved proportionate to the benefits?)

In this section, we would like to have your view concerning the efficiency of the HBERs and the HGL. In your view, do you consider that the costs (for example, legal fees, delays in implementation) of analysing the conditions and applying these instruments is proportionate to the benefits (for example, faster self assessment) of having the rules in place?

Costs

*

5.1 Please describe the different types of costs of applying the current R&D and Specialisation BERs; and the HGL

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Do not know

5.2 Please explain whether you can express the above costs in money terms

Text of 1 to 1000 characters will be accepted

5.3 Please provide an estimate of your quantifiable costs both in terms of value (in EUR) and as a percentage of your annual turnover (or, in the case of a business association, of the annual turnover of the members you are representing)

Text of 1 to 500 characters will be accepted

5.4 Please explain how you calculate these costs

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

* 5.5 In your view, how have the costs generated by the application of the R&D or the Specialisation BER or the HGL evolved **compared with the previous legislative framework** (Reg. 2659/2000 on R&D, Reg. 2658/2000 on Specialisation agreements and the accompanying horizontal guidelines)?

- ☐ Costs increased
- ☐ Costs decreased
- ☒ Do not know

In your view, would the costs of ensuring compliance of your horizontal cooperation agreements (or the agreements of your members) with Article 101 of the Treaty would be different **if the current HBERs were not in place but only the HGL applied?**

* 5.8 Were the **R&D BER** not in place, the cost of ensuring compliance

- ☐ Would increase
- ☐ Would decrease
- ☒ Do not know

5.11 Were the **Specialisation BER** not in place, the cost of ensuring compliance

- ☐ Would increase
- ☐ Would decrease
- ☒ Do not know

Benefits

* 5.14 Please describe the benefits, if any, of having the R&D and Specialisation BERs; and the HGL

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

NA

Benefits vs. costs

In your view, does the application of the R&D and Specialisation BERs and the HGL generate costs that are proportionate to the benefits they bring (or, in the case of a business association, the benefits for the members you are representing)?

* 5.15 Regarding the **R&D BER**

- ☐ Costs are proportionate to benefits
- ☐ Costs are not proportionate to benefits
- ☒ Do not know

* 5.17 Regarding the **Specialisation BER**

- ☐ Costs are proportionate to benefits
- ☐ Costs are not proportionate to benefits
- ☒ Do not know

* 5.19 Regarding the **HGL**

- ☐ Costs are proportionate to benefits
- ☐ Costs are not proportionate to benefits
- ☒ Do not know

6 Relevance (do the objectives still match the needs or problems?)

In this section, we would like to understand if the objectives of the HBERs and the HGL are still up-to-date considering the developments that have taken place since their publication.

6.1 Please identify major trends and developments (for example legal, economic, political) that, based on your experience, have affected the application of the BERs and HGL. Please provide a short explanation with concrete examples in case you consider that (parts of) the HBERs or HGL do not sufficiently allow to address them

1000 characters max. for each row

	Major trends/changes	Articles of the HBERs and/or recitals of the HGL	Short explanation/concrete examples
1	Market concentration through the creation of grocery retail alliances	Section5 HGL	Disappearance of individual, independant retail group and stores
2			
3	Proliferation of grocery retail alliances, whose function is limited to aggregation of buyer power to extract access fees	Section 5 HGL	a set of grocery alliances who do not bundle purchase, they collect fee to allow supplier to access national markets. As such they are creating territorial restraints for suppliers to benefit the opportunity of the Single Market
4	Grocery retail alliances synchronising with other competitors the exclusion of suppliers from some markets (collective delisting mechanism	Section 5	a supplier receive the same day from different retailers present in different national markets that all orders of its brands are stopped and its products removed from shelves which leads to non only lost of sales but a cascade of dysfunctionalities across the supply chain, involving third parties such as transporters, factory suppliers of raw materials. It can lead to temporary unemployment because of stop/reduction of production
5			
6			
7			

Do you think that it is still relevant to have the current HBERs and HGL in light of major trends or developments listed above?

* 6.2 The R&D BER and Section 3 of the HGL are

- ☒ Still relevant
- ☐ No longer relevant
- ☐ Do not know

* 6.3 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Our businesses declare using the R&D Ber and HGL and their disappearance would create again uncertainties and costs

* 6.4 The Specialisation BER and Section 4 of the HGL are

- ☒ Still relevant
- ☐ No longer relevant
- ☐ Do not know

* 6.5 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Our businesses declare using them and their disappearance would create again uncertainties and costs

* 6.6 Section 2 of the HGL on agreements involving information exchange is

- ☒ Still relevant
- ☐ No longer relevant
- ☐ Do not know

* 6.7 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Still relevant and as relevant, need to be reviewed to address new issues as outlined in our paper such as the exchange of grocery retailers through a mix of national and international alliances; the dual role of retailer, be it off or online and exchange of information to address the sustainability challenges

* 6.8 Section 5 of the HGL on purchasing agreements is

- ☒ Still relevant
- ☐ No longer relevant

☐ Do not know

* 6.9 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Still relevant and as relevant, need to be reviewed to address new issues as outlined in our paper such as creation of buyer cooperation who do not purchase, bundle products as set by section 5 of the HGL. New practices such as anti competitive removal of suppliers products from market by the coordination of retailers across a set of countries (collective delisting practices) , need to address the dual role of retailer as purchaser manufacturer brands yet selling its own retailer brands (a customer and a competitor) . Such retail dual role is currently investigated by the COMmission

* 6.10 Section 6 of the HGL on commercialisation agreements is

- ☒ Still relevant
☐ No longer relevant
☐ Do not know

* 6.11 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Still relevant and possibly be reviewed (if not addressed in other sections) to new issues such as grocery retail alliances and dual role of retailers

* 6.12 Section 7 of the HGL on standardisation agreements is

- ☒ Still relevant
☐ No longer relevant
☐ Do not know

* 6.13 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Our businesses declare using them and their disappearance would create again uncertainties and costs

7 Coherence (Does the policy complement other actions or are there contradictions?)

* 7.1 In your view, are the HBERs and the HGL coherent with other instruments and /or case law that provide(s) guidance on the interpretation of Article 101 of the Treaty (e.g., other Block Exemption Regulations, the Vertical Guidelines and the Article 101(3) Guidelines)?

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No
- ☒ Do not know

* 7.3 In your view, are the HBERs and the HGL coherent with other existing or upcoming legislation or policies at EU or national level?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Do not know

8 EU added value (Did EU action provide clear added value?)

In this section, we would like to understand if the HBERs and the HGL have had added value. In the absence of the HBERs and the HGL, undertakings would have had to self-assess their horizontal cooperation agreement with the help of the remaining legal framework. This would include for instance the case law of the EU and national courts, the Article 101(3) Guidelines, the enforcement practice of the Commission and national competition authorities, as well as other guidance at EU and national level.

Please indicate whether, in your view, the HBERs and the HGL have had added value in the assessment of the compatibility of horizontal cooperation agreements with Article 101 of the Treaty

* 8.1 Has the R&D BER had added value in the assessment of the compatibility of horizontal cooperation agreements with Article 101 of the Treaty?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Do not know

* 8.3 Has the Specialisation BER had added value in the assessment of the compatibility of horizontal cooperation agreements with Article 101 of the Treaty?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☒ Do not know

* 8.5 Have the HGL had added value in the assessment of the compatibility of horizontal cooperation agreements with Article 101 of the Treaty?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Do not know

* 8.6 Please explain your reply

Text of 1 to 1500 characters will be accepted

Yes , it is because they add value then we support a review to address new évolutions and bring certainties when businesses engaged in cooperation in Europe

9 Specific questions

Final comments and document upload

9.1 Is there anything else with regard to the R&D and Specialisation BERs and the HGL that you would like to add?

Text of 1 to 3000 characters will be accepted

No

9.2 You may upload a file that further explains your position in more detail or further details the answers you have given

The maximum file size is 1 MB

Only files of the type pdf,txt,doc,docx,odt,rtf are allowed

b47ca494-10e7-493e-b266-5f79072130ef/AIM_Paper_Retail_alliances_and_Horizontal_Agreements_f.pdf

* 9.3 Please indicate whether the Commission services may contact you for further details on the information submitted, if required

☒ Yes

☐ No

Contact

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