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Antitrust: Commission confirms sending Statement of Objections to alleged participants in LCD panels cartel

The European Commission can confirm that in May 2009 it sent a Statement of Objections under EU antitrust rules to a number of companies active in the supply of liquid crystal display (LCD) panels, concerning their alleged participation in a cartel in violation of EC Treaty rules on restrictive business practices (Article 81 of the EC Treaty and Article 53 of the Agreement on the European Economic Area). The product under investigation is the main component of thin, flat monitors used for example in mobile phones, televisions, computers, digital watches and pocket calculators.

LCD panels are made of a lower glass plate (a thin-film transistor or TFT) and an upper glass plate (colour filter formation) with liquid crystal injected between the two plates and placed in front of a light source to serve as a screen on an electronic device. The thin film transistor LCD is a variant of LCD that uses thin film transistor technology to improve the image quality of flat monitors.

LCD panels are mainly used in displays for mobile telephones, portable music players (MP3) and digital cameras, monitors for notebook and personal computers and televisions.

Procedural background

A Statement of Objections is a formal step in Commission antitrust investigations in which the Commission informs the parties concerned in writing of the objections raised against them. The addressee of a Statement of Objections can reply in writing to the Statement of Objections, setting out all facts known to it which are relevant to its defence against the objections raised by the Commission. The party may also request an oral hearing to present its comments on the case.

The Commission may then take a decision on whether the conduct addressed in the Statement of Objections is compatible or not with the EC Treaty's antitrust rules. Sending a Statement of Objections does not prejudge the final outcome of the procedure.