

## Evaluation of procedural and jurisdictional aspects of EU Merger Control

Fields marked with \* are mandatory.

## Evaluation of procedural and jurisdictional aspects of EU Merger Control

### I. Introduction

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*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,<sup>[1]</sup> the Implementing Regulation,<sup>[2]</sup> and the Commission Notice on simplified procedure;<sup>[3]</sup>
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

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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

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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

GSMA

\*Your full name

Emanuela Lecchi

\*Email address

elecchi@gsma.com

\* 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.

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting nearly 800 operators with almost 300 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and internet companies, as well as organisations in adjacent industry sectors. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as Mobile World Congress, Mobile World Congress Shanghai, Mobile World Congress Americas and the Mobile 360 Series of conferences.

For more information, please visit the GSMA corporate website at [www.gsma.com](http://www.gsma.com).

\*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.

Floor 2- The Walbrook Building, 25 Walbrook,  
London EC4N 8AF

## 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

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### 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 checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain.

The 2014 simplification package is to be welcome. The complexity, the timing and the costs of merger control have been reduced by the adoption of the procedure.

*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

The members of the GSMA will reply individually with their experience of notifying transactions under the simplification package but generally speaking the adoption of the package has reduced the burden on companies.

(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

As above

(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

As above

(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

as above

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.

The GSMA does not have direct experience of notification and does not intervene in specific cases. The above is based on the experience of the members.

(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.

As above

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.

As above

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

It is suggested that joint ventures operating outside the EEA should be excluded from the scope of the Merger Regulation.

In addition, any merger which, following pre-notification contact with the Commission, is deemed not to raise competition concerns, should be eligible for the Simplified Procedure, regardless of thresholds.

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.

As explained above, the GSMA does not become involved in specific mergers, but generally speaking the members believe that the 2013 simplification package represents a marked improvement on the previous simplified procedure. It is still the case that even under this notification procedure the costs in terms of workload and resources spent (including by obtaining specialized legal advice) are high for transactions that are unlikely ever to have anti-competitive effects. This explains the selection of "others" above.

- Transactions falling under point 5b of the Notice:

- YES
- NO

Please explain.

As above

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

- YES
- NO

Please explain.

As above

- Transactions falling under point 5d of the Notice:

- YES
- NO

Please explain.

As above

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

As above. The members will be responding individually with their experiences of notifying transactions.

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.

See above Q5

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.

One possible way forward would be by requiring the parties to cases with lighter information requirements to submit the same information as is required presently in the Case Allocation Request. The Request form includes enough information to allow the Commission to decide whether to examine the case.

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.

In self-assessment systems such as the voluntary system of merger control in the UK, in practice often the parties end up carrying out a full analysis of the substantial aspects of a merger, irrespective of the jurisdictional thresholds. This is because the quid pro quo for voluntary notification is often a wide threshold (in the UK, the 'share of supply test') which allows the authority to open an investigation in a great many cases. If the authority opens an investigation after completion of the merger, the costs of 'unscrambling the eggs' are often prohibitive.

This point is already identified by the Commission (see below, after Q.8.4)

The GSMA therefore urges caution. If a system of voluntary notification is considered, it should include clearly applicable thresholds otherwise this approach can result in additional burdens for companies even in cases of mergers which should fall below the thresholds.

#### 8.4 Other

- YES  
 NO

Please explain.

As a general comment, the GSMA strongly suggests that this consultation should be treated as preliminary, to be followed by a consultation on more specific possible suggestions. This is because the questions in this consultation are very open-ended and it is difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment on this basis.

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.

See comment above. It is difficult to consider all possible benefits and potential risks involved in a very great number of permutations. Indeed, some of the risks are already identified by the Commission. The risks posed by a system of self-assessment are also highlighted above in answer to Q.8.4.

*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

The GSMA has no specific experience of this aspect.

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

As above

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

As above

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

As 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.

See above in reply to Q 5. It may be useful for the Commission to provide some statistics about cases where a JV outside the EEA has in fact impacted competition in the EEA. This may show that there could be an issue in some sectors (e.g. for raw materials mined outside the EEA) and if so, a sectoral approach could be applied. The current blanket approach is burdensome without clearly identifying the benefit for consumers.

(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.

See above. Any system that the Commission wishes to introduced should be based on evidence that it will lead to a clearly defined benefit for consumers.

(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](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.

As explained above, the GSMA does not have direct experience of notification of transactions. Nevertheless, anecdotally the GSMA believes that the current turnover thresholds may be insufficient to ensure proper scrutiny of mergers in the digital economy and would support further assessment concerning a value of transaction size threshold.

The Commission should explore in detail whether competitively significant transactions in the digital economy that may not be captured by the current turnover-based threshold have some specific features, such as:

- one of the parties holds a strong/dominant position in one of the markets affected by the transaction; and
- the proportion of the value of the transaction relative to the revenues is noticeably unbalanced.

If the Commission decided to propose alternative or additional criteria alongside any value of transaction threshold (and territorial nexus) it is even more essential that the Commission give stakeholders a chance to comment on any specific, alternative or additional criteria that may be considered.

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

Digital platforms have engaged fiercely in M&A over the past years.

If one looks only at Google, for example, there have been some acquisition of companies with no significant revenues but that were either innovating or had the potential to innovate in markets where Google was either already operating, or planned to enter (e.g. smart homes). Given the highly dynamic nature of markets, there is a thin line between acquiring an innovative company and eliminaitng a potential competitor.

Because of this, such acquisitions may require scrutiny. Consider the following examples:

- 2011 - Google/DailyDeal: (an online deal platform, in the intermediation and e-commerce sector), for \$114 Million .
- 2013 - Google/Waze: (start-up developing mobile application for social mapping, GPS navigation and traffic information), for \$1.1 Billion. At the time of the deal Waze's revenue and assets in the US were below \$70.9 million (the US threshold required for antitrust review).
- 2014 - Facebook/Oculus Rift. Acquisition of Oculus VR (a US provider of virtual reality devices) by Facebook for \$2 billion. Oculus VR could have generated a \$23 million revenue as for 2014, and is expected to generate fast growing revenues in the next five years.
- January 2014 - Google/Nest (smart home solutions):
  - o Nest Rev.s for 2013/14: c.ca \$300M; Value of Transaction: \$3.2Bn
- January 2014 - Google/DeepMind Technologies (AI):
  - o Value of transaction: \$685M; in 2014, DeepMind Technologies made a an operating loss of £85M
- June 2014 - Google's Nest Labs/Dropcam (security cameras):
  - o 2013/14 Revenues: \$30-60M; Value of transaction: \$555M
- October 2014 - Google Nest Lab buys Revolv (smart home hub):
  - o no reported revenues; no reported value of transaction;
  - o Revolv closed in 2016 but Google keeps the valuable engineers.
- 2010 Groupon/MyCityDeal: acquisition of the German e-commerce start-up MyCityDeal ("a daily deals site providing consumers with discounted deals for products and services in Germany") by the US global e-commerce marketplace Groupon (whose global revenue was \$313 Million in 2010), for \$100 Million.

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

This is difficult to say, but given the dynamic nature of digital markets, should not be trivial. Google alone, for example, has made 4-5 transactions per year in the past 4-5 years.

- **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.

Again, this is difficult to say.

Facebook/Whatsapp is a good example of a transaction that qualified for a pre-notification referral - in this sense, the system worked to capture the transaction even though this happened because of the referral procedure. However, the referral procedure depends on national thresholds and is therefore outside the Commission's control. It is interesting that today, this deal would not be reviewed by the Commission, because one of the three countries involved has changed its merger control rules in the interim.

In addition, the above-mentioned M&A significant transactions seem to have been outside the referral system of merger control.

- **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.

The GSMA has no experience of mergers in the pharmaceutical sector.

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.

The GSMA and its members are mostly active in the communication industry - in the mobile telecommunication segment in particular, the current system of merger control thresholds seems to capture all relevant transactions.

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.

As mentioned above, this is difficult to say but the transactions listed in reply to Q.14 suggest that the current referral system may not be sufficient to ensure proper merger scrutiny. Moreover, referral depends on national thresholds, thus outside of the control of the Commission.

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.

As outlined further below at Q19, it is our opinion that the value of the transaction may, in an increasing number of cases, be a better indicator of the significance of the merger than the value of the sales. This is particularly true for new, multi-sided, freemium products/services markets as well as pipeline markets - see below.

- **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.

There may be a number of characteristics of markets in the digital age where the current turnover thresholds are no longer able to ensure that these deals are subject to effective merger control.

Recent proposals in Germany follow the lead of the U.S. merger control policy, which includes a transaction-based threshold where the target does not meet relevant turnover thresholds. The rationale behind this proposed change is to extend BKartA scrutiny to major deals - closed anywhere in the world - with a 'high value' target whose potential in sales is either not yet realised, or based on other valuation criteria. The examples quoted include innovative life science targets (pipeline potential) or IT companies whose value is based on customer data and other assets with unrealised monetisation potential.

The German legislator, in their impact assessment, expect three additional filings per year as a consequence of the introduction of the additional threshold, of which they think at least one would go to phase two of the substantive review.

The GSMA would support the introduction of a deal size threshold, by adding a new alternative threshold in Article 1 of Regulation 139/2004, taking into account (i) a transaction value threshold (to be define by the EC) high enough not to impair investment in the digital sector and (ii) a relevant territorial nexus (as the parties should have a presence or otherwise activities in the EU).

As already mentioned above, the GSMA would favour a second consultation by DG COMP when the proposals are better scoped. This would be important for all aspects raised in this consultation but of special significance for the discussion as to any new merger thresholds to be introduced.

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.

There are two main issues to consider when assessing whether a value of transaction threshold should be included as a criterion for merger control: the value itself and the territorial nexus considered in point 21 below. As the application of the Hart Scott Rodino size of transaction threshold demonstrates, this is a complex exercise. Whilst complexity should not deter the adoption of a size of transaction threshold, it would be important to ensure that the adoption of such thresholds within the EU, both at the EU level and at the national level, does not accidentally lead to a need for multi-jurisdictional filings, thereby negating the one-stop shop nature of merger control at the EU level.

Particularly if the German example is followed in other countries, there would be a risk that a merger meeting the new value threshold in one member state (e.g., in Germany) would require notification both in Germany and at the EU level, and potentially in other countries as well.

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.

The parties should have a presence, data assets, activities (e.g providing goods or services or having patents) in the EU.

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.

For a meaningful discussion of these issues, it would be important to focus on specific proposals. The GSMA would favour a second round of consultations, as mentioned above.

### 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.

The GSMA does not intervene directly in cases but generally speaking the collective view is that the current system does represent an efficient way to allocate cases.

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.

There is an argument that there should be a system to ensure that transactions that are notifiable in two Member States could be reviewed by the Commission to ensure consistency, particularly in cases that have a clear pan-European dimension (to avoid cases like Eurotunnel).

#### 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?

There is scope for improvement. As the GSMA does not intervene directly in mergers, it lacks the experience to know if the proposals in the 2014 SWD would contribute in all cases to achieving this goal. It is important to consider aspects that may require improvement even though these were not considered in the 2014 SWD.

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?

The GSMA highlights that there is a need for improvements in the Commission's practice. Technically speaking, the information requested by the Commission in subsequent, ever more detailed Requests for Informations must be linked to the core competitive analysis. Too often it seems that the Commission is asking information that is very distant both in time and content from the core competitive analysis.

Also; often questions are repetitive indicating a possible lack of coordination between different services within the Commission.

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.

More flexibility regarding time limits would be helpful in particular in phase 2 when parties submit remedy proposals. The current procedure does not allow sufficient time to analyse and market test the remedies, while a lot of time is devoted to assessing competition concerns. Also, the Commission should be able to decide on the opening of phase 2 without having to wait for the end of phase 1 in cases where it is clear that a phase 2 will be necessary.

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

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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.

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