

Commission Decision

of

10 February 1999

imposing fines for failing to notify and for putting into effect three concentrations in breach of Article 4 and Article 7(1) of Council Regulation (EEC) No 4064/89

(Case No IV/M.969 – A.P. Møller)

(Only the Danish text is authentic)

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community,

Having regard to the Agreement on the European Economic Area, and in particular Article 57 thereof,

Having regard to Council Regulation (EEC) No 4064/89 of 21 December 1989 on the control of concentrations between undertakings¹, as amended by Council Regulation (EC) No 1310/97 of 30 June 1997², and in particular Article 14(1)(a) and Article 14(2)(b) thereof,

¹ OJ L 395, 30.12.1989, p. 1; corrected version OJ L 257, 21.09.1990, p. 13.

² OJ L 180, 9.7.1997.

Having given the undertakings concerned the opportunity to make known their views on the objections raised by the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the Advisory Committee on Concentrations³,

³ OJ C199. , p....

WHEREAS :

1. During the examination of the concentration between *Cable & Wireless* and *Maersk Data*⁴ notified pursuant to Article 4 of Regulation (EEC) No 4064/89 (“the Merger Regulation”) it became clear that the Danish company A.P. Møller was to be considered as a group for the purpose of calculating turnover in accordance with Article 5 of the Merger Regulation and that the group’s combined turnover exceeded the thresholds set out in the Merger Regulation. A.P. Møller then examined its past transactions in order to ascertain whether any of them had Community dimension and should thus have been notified to the Commission. As a result, A.P. Møller notified the following three operations: Case No IV/M.988 - *Maersk DFDS Travel*, Commission decision of 4.11.1997; Case No IV/M.1005 - *Maersk Data/Den Danske Bank - DM Data*, Commission decision of 15.1.1998 and Case No IV/M.1009 - *Georg Fischer/DISA*, Commission decision of 10.3.1998. All concentrations were cleared in accordance with Article 6(1)(b) of the Merger Regulation. In all three decisions the Commission noted that the transactions were concluded and put into effect several months before they were notified and that it would therefore have to consider a possible application of Article 14 of the Merger Regulation.
2. With respect to these three concentrations, A.P. Møller did not respect Article 4(1) of the Merger Regulation which provides that concentrations with a Community dimension shall be notified to the Commission not more than one week after the conclusion of the agreement, or the announcement of the public bid, or the acquisition of a controlling interest. A.P. Møller failed also to respect the obligation set out in Article 7(1) according to which a concentration falling under the scope of the Merger Regulation shall not be put into effect either before its notification or within the first three weeks following its notification⁵.
3. On 12 October 1998, A.P. Møller was sent a Statement of Objections under Article 18 of the Merger Regulation, in order to give it the opportunity of

⁴ Case No IV/M.951 – *Cable & Wireless/Maersk Data – Nautec*, Commission decision of 10.07.1997.

⁵ Since the transactions were completed before Regulation (EC) No 1310/97 of 30 June 1997 entered into force, reference is made to the wording of Article 7(1) in Regulation (EEC) No 4064/89 as it was prior to 1 March 1998.

replying to the Commission's objections prior to the possible adoption of a decision pursuant to Article 14.

4. On 21 October 1998, A.P. Møller replied to the Statement of Objections and did not request an oral hearing.
5. The present decision covers all infringements derived from the absence of notifications and unlawful implementations of the three transactions referred to above.

I. BACKGROUND

6. A.P. Møller is the largest Danish privately held company with world-wide activities in shipping, oil exploration and land based industries. The Group's world-wide turnover is approximately [...] ⁶ and its Community-wide turnover is approximately [...] ⁷. The A.P. Møller Group consists of two main companies, Aktieselskabet Dampskibsselskabet Svendborg ("Svendborg") and Dampskibsselskabet af 1912 ("1912"), which are listed on the Copenhagen Stock Exchange. Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller and several family foundations hold in total more than 50% of the shares in Svendborg and 1912, respectively, whereas the remaining shares are widely dispersed. Svendborg and 1912 hold approximately 50/50 of the shares in all companies within the A.P. Møller Group.
7. On 03.06.1997, the undertakings Maersk Data A/S, a member of the Danish A.P. Møller Group, and Cable and Wireless plc notified a proposed concentration pursuant to Article 4 of the Merger Regulation ⁸. In the notification it was stated that Maersk Data was considered to be a part of the A.P. Møller Group for the purposes of calculating the Group's turnover. However, subsequently, A.P. Møller approached the Commission and raised the point whether it constituted a group within the meaning of the Merger Regulation. Its main argument was that, according to Danish law, A.P. Møller had never been obliged to establish consolidated accounts for the whole group. Based on the available information the Commission was, however, of the opinion that A.P. Møller constituted a group within the meaning of the Merger Regulation. A.P. Møller accepted the Commission's position ⁹ and the three above-mentioned transactions were notified.

⁶ The published version omits confidential data.

⁷ Turnover calculated in accordance with Article 5(1) of the Merger Regulation and the Commission Notice on the calculation of turnover (OJ C 66, 02.03.1998, p. 25). In so far as the figures include turnover for the period before 01.01.1999, they are calculated on the basis of average ecu exchange rates and expressed as euro (converted on a one-for-one basis).

⁸ See footnote 4.

⁹ Reference is made to a letter of 16.07.1997 from Hengeler Mueller Weitzel Wirtz on behalf of A.P. Møller and letters of 22.10.1997 and 22.07.1998 from A.P. Møller as well as A.P. Møller's reply to the Statement of Objections.

8. Since A.P. Møller has accepted the Commission's position that A.P. Møller constitutes a group for the purposes of the Merger Regulation, it is not necessary for the present assessment to go into further details on the corporate structure of the A.P. Møller Group.

II. THE INFRINGEMENT

9. The following three transactions had not been notified in accordance with Article 4(1) and Article 7(1) of the Merger Regulation: In the *Maersk DFDS Travel* case, the agreement was concluded on 08.01.1997 (with effect from 01.01.1997); the Commission was informed of its existence on 11.07.1997; and it was notified to the Commission on 06.10.1997. In the *Maersk Data/Den Danske Bank* case, the agreement was concluded on 16.04.1997 (with effect from 15.04.1997); the Commission was informed of its existence on 04.08.1997; and it was notified to the Commission on 01.12.1997. Finally, in the *Georg Fischer/Disa* case, the agreement was concluded on 02.10.1995 (with effect from 01.01.1996); the Commission was informed of its existence on 12.09.1997; and it was notified to the Commission on 09.02.1998.

III. IMPOSITION OF FINES

10. According to Article 14(1)(a) of the Merger Regulation the Commission may by decision impose on the persons referred to in Article 3(1)(b), undertakings or associations of undertakings fines of from EUR 1,000 to 50,000 where, intentionally or negligently, they fail to notify a concentration in accordance with Article 4. Furthermore, Article 14(2)(b) provides that the Commission may by decision impose fines not exceeding 10% of the aggregate turnover of the undertakings concerned within the meaning of Article 5 on the persons or undertakings concerned where, either intentionally or negligently, they put into effect a concentration in breach of Article 7(1). Accordingly, the Commission can impose fines for both infringements in accordance with Article 14(1)(a) and 14(2)(b) of the Merger Regulation.
11. In accordance with Article 14(3) of the Merger Regulation, in setting the amount of the fine, the Commission has to take into consideration the nature and gravity of the infringement. For the reasons explained below, the Commission will also take into account its duration and any aggravating or mitigating circumstances.

Nature of the infringements

12. The nature of the infringements committed in this case is described above. A.P. Møller failed to notify the Commission of three concentrations with a Community

dimension in the period set out in Article 4(1) and put them into effect without respecting the provisions of Article 7(1). The Commission considers that the underlying principles in these provisions are in themselves very important and that their violation undermines the effectiveness of the merger control provisions. Indeed, the obligation of prior notification of concentrations which fall within the scope of the Merger Regulation, allows the Commission to prevent companies from carrying out a concentration before it takes a final decision, thereby avoiding irreparable and permanent harms to competition.

Gravity of the infringements

13. It appears that the late filing and unlawful implementation were not made intentionally in order to circumvent the Commission's control with a view to enforce transactions that would not have passed the tests of the Merger Regulation.
14. In order to qualify A.P. Møller's behaviour, it is necessary to take into account that it is a very large European undertaking with significant activities in Europe and was previously, and is presently, involved in competition cases, both as a complainant and defendant, with the assistance of specialised advisors. A.P. Møller is a member of the Shipping Association which has an office in Brussels and offers advice to its members. Also, A.P. Møller has its own legal department at its head office in Copenhagen. Therefore, A.P. Møller must be expected to be aware - and even have a good knowledge - of Community legislation, including merger control, and it clearly possesses the means to obtain legal advice in order to consider, or at least question, whether its company structure would make some of its operations qualify as a notifiable concentration. Furthermore, the Merger Regulation and the Commission's notice¹⁰ are clear on the interpretation to be given to the notion of a group. It seems therefore reasonable to expect that A.P. Møller should have shown a larger degree of awareness of the legal requirements and regard for them.

¹⁰ Commission notice on calculation of turnover under Council Regulation (EEC) No 4064/89 on the control of concentrations between undertakings, OJ C 66, 02.03.1998, p. 25.

15. In its Reply, and throughout the administrative procedure, A.P. Møller has maintained that the infringements were caused by the fact that A.P. Møller, and its affiliates, according to Danish law have never been considered, and are still not considered, for corporate, tax and other purposes, as a group of companies obliged to establish consolidated accounts. However, this argument cannot be taken into account, in view of basic principles of Community law such as direct applicability of Community regulations in Member States and supremacy of Community law.
16. Based on the above, the negligence shown by A.P. Møller cannot be considered as merely caused by error or ignorance. On the contrary, the aspects mentioned above suggest that the behaviour of A.P. Møller can be characterised as one of qualified negligence. In its Reply, A.P. Møller has not contested the Commission's position.

Duration of the infringement

17. As has been indicated above, the concentration was unlawfully operated for a significant time without the Commission's authorisation. Moreover, once the Commission was at length informed of the transactions, A.P. Møller took a considerable time before notifying them. While the Commission recognises that reasonable time must be allowed in order to submit a notification in accordance with the requirements set out in Form CO, it is in general considered that companies committing an offence have an obligation to regularise their infringements as soon as possible. In its reply to the Statement of Objections, A.P. Møller stated that the information needed for the notification was extremely difficult and time-consuming to gather. The Commission considers that the time which A.P. Møller took to notify is longer than could reasonably be expected. However, given that this is the first decision dealing with this aspect, the Commission will not, when calculating the duration of the infringement, take into account the period between the time when the Commission was informed of the transactions and the submission of the notifications.
18. The Commission considers that, the infringements in this case, for the reasons explained above, should be treated as having lasted from the date when the

transactions were put into effect in breach of Article 7(1) of the Merger Regulation until A.P. Møller first informed the Commission of this¹¹.

19. On that basis, the duration of the infringement for each of the three cases would be as follows: IV/M.988 – *Maersk DFDS Travel*: 6 months; IV/M.1005 – *Maersk Data/Den Danske Bank – DM Data*: 3 months; and IV/M.1009 – *Georg Fischer/DISA*: 20 months. Accordingly, the total period of 29 months for the three transactions will be used by the Commission in calculating the amount of the fines to be imposed in accordance with Article 14(2)(b). The risk of prejudice to the consumer increases proportionately with the duration of the infringement. In the present case, the infringement lasted for a significant time and the Commission considers that this factor should be taken into account in determining the fine.
20. As has been shown above, all three concentrations operated for a considerable time without the Commission's authorisation and a considerable time elapsed before they were notified.

Mitigating circumstances

21. The Commission acknowledges the following mitigating circumstances.
 - A.P. Møller has recognised the breach;
 - All cases were straightforward from a competition point of view and there was no damage to competition;
 - When it was confirmed that A.P. Møller was to be considered as a group for the purpose of the notification in the *Cable & Wireless/Maersk Data - Nautec* case, A.P. Møller voluntarily informed the Commission of its failure to notify other transactions before the Commission discovered any infringement. A.P. Møller subsequently notified all three transactions;
 - The infringements took place at the same time as the one which was the object of the *Samsung* decision, at a moment in which the Commission had not yet taken any decision under Article 14 of the Merger Regulation.

¹¹ See also Case No IV/M.920 – *Samsung/AST*, Commission decision of 18.02.1998.

This circumstance was considered as a mitigating factor in the *Samsung* decision and the same reasoning applies in the present case.

Conclusion

22. The Commission considers that fines must be imposed on A.P. Møller taking into account in particular the fact that the absence of notification, and the implementation of the operation without the Commission's authorisation, lasted for a significant period, and that for a multinational company like A.P. Møller those failures constitute a clear case of gross negligence that cannot be ignored. The Commission has a duty to uphold the basic principle that undertakings should be deterred from carrying out concentrations falling within the scope of the Merger Regulation without making appropriate notifications, and it should therefore use the powers granted to it by the Council for that purpose. Accordingly, the Commission considers it necessary to impose fines on A.P. Møller pursuant to Article 14 of the Merger Regulation.

IV. AMOUNT OF THE FINES

23. Based on the above, in order to penalise the infringements and to prevent repetition thereof and taking into account the circumstances of the case, the Commission considers it appropriate to impose a fine of:

EUR 15,000 for each transaction (i.e. EUR 45,000 in total for all three transactions) in relation to the infringement of Article 14(1)(a); and

EUR 6,000 per month for each of the 6, 3 and 20 months respectively, (i.e. EUR 174,000 for 29 months in total for all three transactions) in relation to the infringement of Article 14(2)(b),

giving a total fine of EUR 219,000 for all three transactions.

24. The relationship between the amount of fines imposed by the Commission in accordance with Article 14(1)(a) and those imposed in accordance with Article 14(2)(b) is appropriate in the specific circumstances of this case and does not prejudice any future case arising under Article 14.
25. The calculation of the fine in accordance with Article 14(2)(b) on the basis of the number of months is appropriate in the specific circumstances of this case and does not prejudice any future case arising under Article 14,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

1. A total fine of EUR 45,000 is hereby imposed on A.P. Møller pursuant to Article 14(1)(a) of Regulation (EEC) No 4064/89 for its failure to notify three concentrations in accordance with Article 4 of that Regulation.
2. A total fine of EUR 174,000 is hereby imposed on A.P. Møller pursuant to Article 14(2)(b) of Regulation (EEC) No 4064/89 for putting into effect three concentrations in breach of Article 7 of that Regulation.

Article 2

The fines referred to in Article 1 shall be paid to the European Commission within three months of the date of notification of this Decision to account number 310-0933000-43 at the Banque Bruxelles-Lambert, Agence européenne, Rond-point Schuman 5, B – 1040 Brussels.

Upon expiry of that period, interest shall be automatically payable on the fines at the rate charged by the European Central Bank for transactions in euro on the first working day of the month in which this Decision is adopted, plus 3.5 percentage points.

Article 3

This Decision is addressed to:

A.P. Møller

Esplanaden 50

DK – 1098 Copenhagen K.

Done at Brussels,

For the Commission,