Sixth European Competition Day in Copenhagen

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The sixth European Competition Day took place on 17.9.2002 in Copenhagen. It focused on two themes: ‘Competition, consumers and globalisation’ and ‘Competition and consumers in the EU compared with other regions’. The audience of 250 participants was composed of lawyers, representatives of industry, public authorities, university teachers, consumer representatives and journalists.

The conference was opened by Danish Economic Affairs Minister Bendt Bendtsen who emphasised Denmark’s undertaking to have the new rules for the implementation of Articles 81 and 82 adopted by the Competitiveness Council in November. Commissioner Mario Monti introduced the first topic with a speech on the need for a global competition policy. He underlined that in a global economy the benefits for consumers deriving from competition can be guaranteed by competition authorities only if international co-operation among them is stepped up. In this context he presented the initiative to create an International Competition Network. Subsequently Mrs Randzio-Plath, MEP, pleaded in favour of a structured link between competition and employment policy, notably for participation rights of employee representatives in merger proceedings. Jim Murray, Director of the Bureau of European Consumer Associations, acknowledged the need to create more consumer awareness of the value of competition and asked for closer involvement of consumers in competition proceedings as interested parties. He proposed to give consumers the possibility to seek redress in courts for damages caused by anticompetitive behaviour.

The ensuing panel debate focussed on these issues, in particular on the link to employment policy, but also on the Commission’s reform proposals for antitrust and merger proceedings and the application of competition rules to cultural activities.

In the afternoon session Richard E. Hecklinger, Deputy Secretary General of the OECD, compared the different competition cultures in the EU and the USA. He suggested that ‘keener’ competition in the US may be caused by a much stronger pro-competition approach in legislation. Finn Lauritzen, Head of the Danish Competition Authority, presented competition benchmarks, indicating that Denmark would still rate below average in competition performance. Kjeld Johannesen, CEO of Danish Crown, the leading Danish meat processor, criticised competition authorities and their approach, claiming that the real world did not coincide with ‘market ideals’ of civil servants.

In the panel debate this last position was not supported. It was noted that, possibly due to the high concentration in food processing, prices in Denmark were be relatively high and product choice too low.

The Copenhagen European Competition Day offered interesting and sometimes entertaining presentations and stimulating debates to a diverse audience. It certainly contributed to the objective to raise public interest in competition policy, as was underlined by good extensive coverage in the Danish press.

The full text of the speeches is available under http://www.ks.dk.
EUROPEAN COMPETITION DAY IN ATHENS

The seventh European Competition Day takes place on 14 February 2003 in Athens.

The conference will be hosted and organised by the Greek Competition Authority in collaboration with DG Competition.

More information, notably on topics and registration will be published on DG Competition’s website as soon as it is available.