Insurance Network: the ECN sectoral group on insurance

Elena CAPRIOLI, Directorate-General Competition, unit D-1

Objectives

Earlier this year, Directorate-General for Competition took the initiative to create an expert group dedicated to insurance matters. The aim is to improve information-sharing on insurance issues within the framework of the European Competition Network (ECN).

The ‘Insurance Network’ is a group of experts from the National Competition Authorities of existing and new Member States with specialist knowledge of the insurance industry.

The new forum will make it easier for the EU’s Competition Authorities to exchange information and best practices on practical competition issues regarding the EU insurance sector, as well as sharing experiences on developments in national markets and market monitoring.

In addition, the Network will contribute to monitoring the effects of the new block exemption Regulation for the insurance sector, which came into force in April this year.

The first meeting

The first meeting of the Insurance Network took place on 26 June 2003 in Brussels.

The meeting confirmed the importance of regular discussions between the competition authorities on specific sectoral issues.

The agenda included presentations from DG Competition and National Competition Authorities, which provided input from a national perspective. There was a lively and interesting exchange of views after each presentation.

The discussions made clear that the Commission and National Authorities share many areas of common concern and that future co-operation can contribute to promote a coherent enforcement of competition law in the EU.

As for working methods, the Network uses a secured electronic forum.

The way forward

Delegates welcomed this Commission initiative, particularly since the creation of this group has allowed its members to establish personal contacts and has set the framework for a continuous exchange of communication between the Network’s members.

One of the main conclusions of the meeting was to organise the Network’s future activities within three main axes:

— structural characteristics of insurance markets;
— sharing of methodologies for market monitoring;
— specific sector related issues.

This new initiative is very much in keeping with the aims of the new antitrust Regulation 1/2003, which provides for closer co-operation between National Competition Authorities and the Commission.

This co-operation is of particular importance in the complex and diverse field of EU insurance markets where we face a common challenge: to enable consumers and businesses to benefit from greater competition.