
PRESS RELEASE
13 December 2021
For Immediate Release

Asia-Pacific competition authority leaders shares experience and expertise on response to Covid pandemic, competition/industrial policy priorities

PARIS, 13 December 2021–The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) today hosted the 6th Meeting of High-Level Representatives of Asia-Pacific Competition Authorities.

The virtual event saw members of the most senior leadership of the region's competition agencies exchange knowledge and experience of their agencies' responses to the Covid-19 crisis amid a broader discussion of the countervailing priorities of competition policy and industrial policy.

Senior representatives of competition authorities in 17 jurisdictions attended the summit: **Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.**

The meeting also saw the launch of the report **OECD Asia-Pacific Competition Law Enforcement Trends 2021** by the Competition Programme of the OECD/Korea Policy Centre, an international co-operation organization established between the OECD and the Korean government.

During the past two decades, Asia-Pacific has witnessed a remarkable increase in the importance of competition, to which the outbreak of the Covid pandemic has posed specific challenges.

Among the issues the agency representatives discussed were the range of actions taken by competition authorities in the region to mitigate anticompetitive conduct arising from the circumstances of the pandemic, and steps to foster and secure a fair and durable economic recovery as it is brought under control.



Experiences the authorities shared included a heightened focus on online platforms and e-commerce, which presented novel challenges and prompted much discussion of approaches to regulating the rapidly-evolving digital economy, recognized as a permanent change to consumer and business-to-business markets accelerated by Covid.

Some representatives reported developments more specific to their jurisdictions, such as the planned introduction of a merger control regime in Malaysia, the value of market studies in Australia and New Zealand, and changes to the regulation of the market for generic medicines in India.

They cited regulatory responses to the crisis that included, on the one hand, a relaxation of merger review procedural requirements and timelines and, on the other, stepped-up advocacy and enforcement aimed at maintaining the role of competition considerations in policymaking.

Looking ahead, there was a consensus that the region's competition authorities should increase collaboration with one another, which was cited as a key means of disseminating valuable knowledge and experience, particularly in respect of developments in the digital economy. The role of the OECD was acknowledged as important for this international discussion of best practices.

Turning to the interplay between competition policy with industrial policy – a debate central to the economic growth objectives of each – authorities expressed a range of views, from hailing the benefits of unfettered competition to advocating complementarity between the two strands of policymaking and a potentially larger role for competition advocacy for competition principles to be in-built into industrial policies. To spearhead the debate, the **OECD invited Ha-Joon Chang, Professor at the University of Cambridge, Thomas Cheng, Associate Professor at the University of Hong Kong and Ana Sofia Rodrigues, Chief Economist at the Portuguese Competition Authority.**

Meeting **Chair Allan Fels** recognized that the specificity of industrial policy presented a challenge to the broader, more universalizing priorities of competition policy, saying: "There is scope for the OECD to keep talking more about the intersection of industry policy and competition policy to enable us to develop a framework of questions at least about the competition implications, in detail, of industry policy."

Ismail Iskandar, Chief Executive Officer of the Malaysia Competition Commission (MyCC), said: "Enforcement and advocacy are both critical components of competition authorities' activities, and although practices such as monopolistic conduct and syndicated price increases are issues that concern regulators across Asia-Pacific, we must also draw more attention to the clear benefits of strong competition policies and laws in open markets, which will help us emerge from this difficult period and help to drive economic growth in the years ahead."

Sakon Varanyuwatana, Chair of Thailand’s Office of the Trade Competition Commission, said the internationalization of authorities’ approaches to competition was a burgeoning trend, pointing to the proliferation of business activity online and across borders. “Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, e-commerce has flourished, and we anticipate an increased focus on regulation for the sector within Thailand and beyond as we look at what our peer agencies are doing to address competition issues that have emerged with its rapid growth. When we and our fellow regulators share our diverse experiences and novel approaches to dealing with issues in this space and others, we all gain.”

In the context of the meeting, **Rod Sims, Chair of the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission**, said: “Competition regulators in Asia-Pacific are being required increasingly to deal with issues that extend across national boundaries, and which need to be addressed at a regional and international level. We have a lot to learn from one another’s experiences, particularly in the context of the rapidly evolving digital economy, whose development has been accelerated by the Covid pandemic.”

Further, **Philippine Competition Commission Chair Arsenio Balisacan** highlighted the importance of creating a culture of competition in jurisdictions that had enacted competition regulatory systems in recent years, saying: “**A key step in taking competition into all aspects of policymaking is mainstreaming it in the economic development agenda. We and our colleagues from competition agencies around the region are prioritizing working with other agencies in government, and with each other, to make competition considerations an integral part of the policymaking process.**”

OECD Senior Competition Expert Ruben Maximiano said: “Competition authorities can move from being market watchdogs to being also market guide-dogs, helping policymakers develop policies that foster well-functioning markets—a particularly important role for them to play in the context of economic recovery measures.”

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REFERENCE:

Penelope P. Endozo
publicaffairs@phcc.gov.ph
Public Affairs Division
Philippine Competition Commission

About the Meeting of High-Level Representatives of Asia-Pacific Competition Authorities
The Meeting of High-Level Representatives of Asia-Pacific Competition Authorities is a unique annual gathering of the heads and senior representatives of competition agencies throughout Asia-Pacific that aims to further the exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise at the highest levels of antitrust regulation and enforcement.

Now in its 5th year, the summit offers senior competition authorities the opportunity to share and develop their practice and application of competition law and policy, and to generate fresh ways of thinking about existing and novel challenges that face the regulatory community in the Asia-Pacific region, with the support of the OECD.

Previous meetings of the group have focused on issues including Prioritisation, Competitive Neutrality, Competition issues in Digital Markets and Competition Reactions to the Covid-19.

The Meeting of High-Level Representatives of Asia-Pacific Competition Authorities has been held in a virtual format since 2020, but is expected to transition into a face-to-face event in the coming years as the most important regional summit dedicated to competition issues, drawing the most senior and influential competition enforcement officials in Asia-Pacific.