

COMPETITION NEWSLETTER



TURKISH
COMPETITION
AUTHORITY



ISSUE 2



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“ Foreword

We are honored to introduce you the second issue of the Competition Newsletter, Turkish Competition Authority's (TCA) quarterly published periodical. In this winter term, while we welcome 2024, we take a look back to 2023 and we would proudly like to share the overall picture we depicted:

In 2023, 58 investigations were concluded in total. For 46 of them, in which violations were detected or the undertakings settled with the TCA, a total of 2.3 billion TL fine was imposed. However, in some markets, guiding how to open the market to competition becomes more important than simply imposing fines or stopping violations. In this regard, 6 of the investigations were terminated by accepting the commitments made by the undertakings. We are currently working on 45 investigations, 35 of which have been initiated in 2023.

In light of this picture, with its aim to highlight the main activities of the TCA, this issue addresses the concluded and newly opened investigations during the last three months, as in the [first issue](#). In addition, this time, legislative actions, Phase II merger reviews, sector inquiries and major news from the TCA are also covered.

Wish you a happy new year and have a good read.

Department of External Relations and Competition Advocacy



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Concluded Investigations by Infringement Types



Cartel



Abuse Of
Dominance



Abuse of Dominance
and Vertical Restraint



Resale Price Maintenance



Resale Price Maintenance
& Internet Sales Ban



Resale Price Maintenance
& Regional Sales Restriction
& NonCompete Clause



Internet Sales Ban



Passive Sales Ban
& Internet Sales Ban



1. Concluded Investigations

(15th September - 31st December)

During the period between September and December, TCA concluded 30 investigations in the sectors spanning mainly across food, cosmetics, consumer electronics/household appliances, agricultural vehicles and private dormitories markets.

As can be seen from the chart, in the winter term, majority of the investigations are clustered on restrictive agreements including 7 horizontal and 20 vertical arrangements. Additionally, in 2 cases, exclusivity practices were investigated based on restrictive agreements and abuse of dominance claims.

- **Cartel investigations** concerned 5 price agreements and 2 information exchange claims,
 - While administrative fines were imposed in 3 of them, in 2 of them the TCA issued settlement decisions, and in the remaining 2 no infringement was detected.
 - Among the cases where fines were imposed, cartel agreements on egg prices are worth mentioning, since the Board has focused on retail price restrictions as they influence the end consumers at the first hand. The TCA executed 2 investigations on egg production and sales market which ended up with infringement decisions. The other case was about the sensitive information exchange claims.
 - The settlement decisions concerned agreements on the private dormitory prices and agreements between geology engineers.





Concluded Investigations

- ▶ **Abuse of dominance investigations** were into 1) Storytel (a digital audiobook platform), which was concluded with a commitment decision, into 2) private jet fuel supply market and finally into 3) clear aligner markets, both of which were concluded with no infringement decision.
- ▶ **As for the vertical restraint cases**, the number of RPM claims continue to draw particular attention, since 18 out of 20 vertical restraints cases involve RPM concerns, either solely or combined with other vertical restraints such as territorial and/or internet sales restrictions and/or noncompete clauses. The investigated markets were fast moving consumer goods, food, cosmetics and consumer electronics/household appliances for RPM practices; automotive for the passive sales and internet sales restrictions. RPM conducts are considered hard-core restrictions according to De Minimis Communiqué No 2021/3. With the exception of two RPM cases, all RPM investigations were concluded with settlement decisions and all other vertical restraints were concluded with commitment decisions.

The settlement and commitment mechanisms were brought into force with an amendment to the [Act no 4054](#) in 2020. The vertical restriction cases clearly reveal the efficiencies gained from these mechanisms. Indeed, 5 of the vertical restriction investigations as well as 2 of the horizontal restriction investigations, the launch of which we had previously announced in the previous issue of the Competition Newsletter, have been terminated in the period of this issue. The average time of these investigations accounts to 116 days. Below, further information for the selected investigations is provided.





1.1. Manipulation of egg prices has been curbed.

In January 2022, the Board initiated a preliminary investigation into undertakings and associations of undertakings operating in the production and sale of eggs, which play a crucial role in the diet of people of all ages. Considering the different nature of the acts in the context of the evidence gathered, the Board initiated two separate investigations into undertakings and associations of undertakings respectively.

During the first investigation, the number of parties increased from 17 to 34, for 14 of which the investigation was terminated with a settlement decision on 26.10.2023. For 12 undertakings, the Board imposed administrative fines due to their cartel practices. Since there was no sufficient evidence for the remaining 8, no infringement was detected.

Similarly the second investigation against the Central Union of Egg Producers and 12 local unions affiliated with the Central Union was concluded with an infringement decision since they determined the base price of the egg product sold in Türkiye and restricted the supply amount. Where the association had a turnover, a separate fine was imposed on the association too.

Highlights:

- In the egg market, in total, 26 undertakings were found to have violated competition rules and were fined based on the finding of price fixing and region/customer allocation.
- In addition to practices of the undertakings, association's decisions were also found anticompetitive.





Highlights:

- Most of the investigations were concluded with settlement decisions.
- So far, 22 of the investigations have been concluded through settlements and each undertaking has been granted a 25% discount and the undertakings have been subject to administrative fine of TL 161,661,249.26 in total.
- 3 companies did not participate in the settlement and commitment processes and the investigation against these undertakings are ongoing.



1.2. Intervention in sellers' prices and restriction of internet sales continue to be on the Board's radar.

Vertical interventions are frequently encountered as a structural problem in the cosmetics sector for reasons such as trying to keep the brand perception high, trying to create a luxury product image in products and selling products with high consumer dependency.

The Covid 19 pandemic greatly increased the importance of the internet sales channel since consumers and store owners could not physically come together. The decline in consumer demand together with the rise in the number of products that are shifted to the internet channel, increased the amount of products and the number of sellers in the internet channel. This all led to a downward pressure on prices. In the face of this situation, several cosmetics sector companies resorted to various anticompetitive measures and actions.

Therefore, the TCA has focused its attention on RPM practices and/or restriction of internet sales in cosmetics market. In the first months of 2022, starting with the Hayırlı El investigation in the cosmetics sector, a large amount of evidence was obtained showing that resellers' sales in online marketplaces were restricted and/or the resale prices were interfered with by the providers. Then, investigations have intensified in 2023.

In this context, the process started with 6 companies including Avon Cosmetics, Kosan Cosmetics known for its Flormar brand, Engin Group, which distributes brands such as Farmasi, Wella, Calvin Klein, Lacoste, Versace, NAOS; Istanbul Cosmetics known for its Bioderma brand and Pierre Fabre Dermo Cosmetics known for its Avene brand. Then, this trend continued with 17 cosmetics companies, including ELCA Cosmetics, L'Oreal Turkey, Rebul Cosmetics, Easyvit Health Products and Ege Teknoloji Kimya.

Finally, Amway Turkey Izmir Branch, Ersag Temizlik Kozmetik, Hunca Life Kozmetik, Oriflame Kozmetik and Tiens, which mostly operate through direct sales, were added to the investigation.





1.3. Investigation into Storytel has been concluded with commitments.

The TCA had launched an investigation on Storytel on 06.04.2023 upon the claims of preventing competitors from entering and expanding in the online audiobook streaming services market through long-term exclusivity agreements signed with publishers/right holders. Within the scope of the investigation, Storytel's agreements with publishers/right holders and the exclusivity clauses in these agreements, which prevent competitors from concluding agreements with the same publisher/right holder on the relevant piece, were examined.

For the agreements in question, which are divided into two groups as ALAs (Audiobook License Agreements) and CDAs (Content Distribution Agreements), it has been concluded that ALAs specifically have the potential to be detrimental to competition. That is because with CDAs, the written work can still be converted to audiobooks by competitors of Storytel, however with ALAs this is not possible.

Storytel submitted commitments to remove the exclusivity clauses in the agreements. The Board accepted the final version of the commitments on 30.11.2023 and the investigation was finalized without a fine.

- Existing ALAs that have been in force for more than a year will be amended in order not to provide Storytel any exclusive right to produce the audiobook format of a particular title anymore, and existing ALAs that have been in force for less than one year will be amended so as not to provide an exclusive right upon the completion of the first year of the relevant agreement.
- Future ALAs will not provide Storytel any exclusive right to produce the audiobook format of a particular book.
- CDAs will not provide exclusivity/full license over distributed content.
- Dubbing agreements will not include any obligation for voice actors to dub exclusively for Storytel.





1.4. Periodic penalties imposed on Meta for not complying with the Board Decision.

As part of the announcement that Meta's terms of use and privacy policies on WhatsApp were updated in January 2020, notifications were sent to each user requesting their consent to the sharing of their personal WhatsApp data with Meta Platforms Inc. in order to continue using WhatsApp within the scope of the update. In this context, the Board initiated an investigation into this "take it or leave it" coercion of consumers and the ongoing data sharing practices between Meta companies. As a result of the investigation, it was determined that these data combining actions enabled Meta, which already has a very detailed data set, to create much more detailed user profiles, thus made Meta preferred more by advertisers. Accordingly, it was concluded that Meta limited competition in the online display advertising market and social networking services market by making it difficult for competitors to operate and by deterring new entries into the market, thus abused its dominant position. As a result of the investigation, Meta was imposed an administrative fine of 346,717,193.40 TL. In addition to the fine, The Board obliged Meta

- To stop combining the data collected from Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp services,
- To technically separate this data,
- To use the data obtained from these applications only for the development of the relevant application and advertising activities in this application.

As part of the compliance with the remedies, many meetings were held with Meta over a period of more than a year and many draft compliance petitions were submitted to the TCA. However, the Board did not find the final compliance solution offered by Meta sufficient to end the violation and ensure the establishment of effective competition in the market, thus imposed a periodic penalty on META in the context of Article 17(1)(a) and Article 17(2) of the Act No 4054.

Highlights:

- This case stands out as the first decision of the TCA to prevent data combining practices in digital markets.
- Although META further developed its proposed solution for compliance and submitted it to the Board, this was not found sufficient to address the competitive concerns.





Highlights:

- The case is the first comprehensive investigation into the tractor manufacturing and marketing sector.
- The vast majority of players in the tractor sector submitted comprehensive commitments regarding vertical competition concerns and these commitments were accepted by the Board.



1.5. Commitments submitted by undertakings operating in tractor manufacturing and marketing sector to eliminate vertical competitive concerns were accepted by the Board.

The preliminary inquiry was initiated upon the complaint that the undertakings operating in the tractor sector prevented consumers from purchasing tractors from dealers outside the regions they reside.

- The Board has decided to initiate an investigation against 10 undertakings.
- Undertakings submitted commitments such as revising dealership contracts in accordance with competition law, ending violation practices, providing competition law training to dealers and employees, and sharing notifications with dealers and employees which summarize the commitments and explain the rules to be followed.
- The investigation process is ongoing.





Highlights:

- The acquisition transaction is similar to the European Commission's vertical merger cases in the Ro-Ro sector like DFDS/HSF Logistic decision of 2021 and DFDS/Norfolk decision of 2010.



2. Merger Review

2.1. DFDS-EKOL acquisition is authorized with behavioral commitments.

DFDS A/S (DFDS) operates in the fields of international maritime transportation, terminal management, ship agency services and land logistics in Europe, while in Türkiye, through its subsidiary, it operates Pendik Ro-Ro Port, in the port services market for Ro-Ro vessels and in the field of Ro-Ro transportation. EKOL Lojistik AŞ (EKOL) is active in the land, air and sea transportation, intermodal transportation, fair and exhibition logistics, and services closely related to these activities. EUTS BV (EUTS), a subsidiary of EKOL, on the other hand, operates in the international transportation sector.

For the acquisition of the business line of EKOL by DFDS, the Board identified a vertical overlap between EKOL's international freight transportation activities by road and the operations of DFDS in Ro-Ro transportation market. Accordingly, the transaction was analyzed within the scope of the "Guidelines on Non-Horizontal Mergers and Acquisitions" and evaluated in terms of unilateral effects and coordinated effects.

Regarding unilateral effects, the third parties whose opinion was consulted stated a concern that after the transaction, information DFDS held would be shared with EKOL. Also the shipping undertakings were concerned about a potential discrimination against EKOL in the onboarding and booking stages of the DFDS.

In response to these concerns, DFDS provided the following commitments:

- A complete and effective information-communication wall (Chinese Wall) will be established to operate as a barrier against the passage of any information, including customer lists, the consignee and consignor of the cargo, the weight of the cargo, the volume of the cargo, the nature of the cargo and the value of the goods, regarding the information obtained from downstream and upstream competitors within the scope of the activities of DFDS and EKOL arising from the vertical merger, and in this way, both EKOL and DFDS will not share with each other the competition-sensitive information obtained within the scope of their ongoing commercial relations.
- DFDS's reservation and embarkation procedures that existed before the transaction will continue after the transaction for all customers without any change, thus preventing any potential discrimination in favor of EKOL.
- The duration of the behavioral commitments will be three years and can be extended for another three years at the end of the period if deemed necessary by the Board. The Board found these behavioural commitments sufficient to address the concerns.



Newly Initiated Investigations by Types of Claims



Cartel



Cartel & Abuse of Dominance



Cartel & Vertical Restraints



Abuse of Dominance



Vertical Restraints



3. Newly Initiated Investigations

(15th September - 31st December)

During the same term, the TCA launched 17 new investigations.

► **The cartel investigations** are mostly in local scale, four of which contain price fixing allegations in professional activities, car dealership, accommodation, publication, logistics & storage sectors in the cities of Afyon, Adana-Antalya-Gaziantep, Giresun, and Antalya respectively. Additionally, one cartel investigation pertains to bid rigging activities in power transformer market.

► **The abuse of dominance case** concerns allegations of discriminatory behavior in the evaluation of unlicensed electricity generation applications. This case was opened upon the Court's reversal decision.

► **Vertical restraint cases**, particularly RPM claims continue to draw attention, since 8 out of 11 vertical restraints cases involved RPM concerns, either solely or together with other vertical restraints such as territorial, customer and/or internet sales restrictions. The markets being investigated were fast moving consumer goods and cosmetics for the RPM probes, whereas "online betting and digital sports platforms" and "pay television broadcasting market of Turkish Super League and 1st League competitions" were investigated for exclusive dealing and passive sales restriction concerns respectively.





3.1. A second investigation against Meta has been opened.

In July 2023, Meta announced the launch of a new app called Threads. The app has attracted attention by swiftly reaching more than 100 million users after being launched in more than 100 countries, including Türkiye, the US and the UK, but was not released in the EU. In order to log in to Threads, the user must have an Instagram account, and if the user wants to remove its Threads account, he/she also has to delete the associated Instagram account.

In August 2023 the Board launched a preliminary investigation into Meta following a complaint, for tying Threads with Instagram. The complainant was a user who wanted to remove his Threads account but did not want to delete his Instagram account. In addition, some of Meta's practices (data combining concerns) on Threads were examined ex officio. An investigation was initiated as a result.

Within the scope of the investigation, it will be scrutinized whether META abuses its dominant position by tying its social media applications Threads and Instagram, leveraging its market power to create an unfair advantage, thereby limiting end user choice and by combining and cross using data obtained from both the aforementioned applications, and creating a dataset unattainable by competitors operating in the relevant markets.

Highlights:

- Meta announced that users are able to independently delete their Threads accounts without affecting their Instagram accounts. However, users still need to have an Instagram account to use Threads.
- Meta has launched its Threads app to users across the EU under different subscription terms, five months after its release in other parts of the world. It seems that when the Threads was initially launched in the world, it could not be made available in the EU due to the integration between Threads and Instagram and data combining practises which were prohibited in the DMA.
- The first investigation in the world was initiated by the TCA on Meta's tying and data combining practices among Threads and Instagram.
- Meta had previously been imposed an administrative fine by the Board for its data combining practices ([Decision numbered 22-48/706-299](#)).





3.2. A preliminary investigation into the construction chemicals market (in collaboration with the EU and the UK) has been opened.

On October 17, 2023, the TCA launched a preliminary investigation into undertakings active in Türkiye construction chemicals markets.

This preliminary investigation aimed at determining whether undertakings violated competition law in construction chemicals (and especially chemical mixtures) markets through concluding agreements on pricing strategies, exchanging competitively sensitive information and collusive bidding.

To that end, on-site inspections were conducted at the premises of 14 undertakings and 2 associations of undertakings between October 17-19, 2023.

Construction chemicals primarily consist of chemical additives and mixtures. These additives and mixtures are added to certain construction products such as cement, concrete and grout to change and improve the characteristics of these products. Thus, additives and mixtures in the construction chemicals category are used as an important input in the cement and ready-mix concrete sectors which determine their characteristics and quality.

The preparatory work for the preliminary investigation on construction chemicals markets was done in cooperation with the European Commission Directorate General for Competition. The on-site inspections carried out by the TCA on October 17 were conducted simultaneously and in coordination with the European Commission and the UK Competition and Markets Authority.

Highlights:

- This case represents a remarkable example for international cooperation in dawn raids. An investigation was initiated by the Board upon the findings.





4. Sector Inquiries

4.1. The Board opened its second sector inquiry on red meat market.

The red meat market is one of the markets regularly monitored by the TCA. The first sector inquiry was completed in 2011. For the past 12 years, various changes have been observed in the sector both in Türkiye and in the world.

In the last two years, increases in red meat prices captured the TCA's attention. In two separate comprehensive preliminary investigations conducted, it was examined whether the price increases in the sector were caused by anticompetitive agreements and/or decisions of undertakings and associations of undertakings. No competition infringement has been detected. Yet, the main fact observed in these investigations has been that there are some structural problems behind the price increases in the sector.

Thus, for an in-depth examination of the market dynamics in the sector, the Board decided to address the issue in a sector inquiry. The sector inquiry aims to first assess the competitive conditions faced by the players in the market and whether there are significant entry barriers in the market. The inquiry aims to develop competition policy recommendations to improve competition conditions in the market and put forward solutions to eliminate the obstacles to the healthy functioning of the free market mechanism.

With the fundamental goal of enabling all consumers to access red meat in an economic way by improving competitive conditions at all levels of the market, the inquiry is aimed to be completed in 2024.

Highlights:

- In the assessments carried out on the sector, it has been determined that the main reason behind the price increases in the sector was structural problems.
- The goal is to eliminate the obstacles to the healthy functioning of the free market mechanism through this sector inquiry.





Highlights:

- The ambiguities encountered in the former Regulation have been eliminated with the new one.
- With the new Regulation, the distinction between the requirement to submit a document with added value for the active cooperation procedure and the settlement procedure has been clarified.
- ***The new Regulation has been nominated for the 2024 Antitrust Writing Awards in the “Soft Laws & Studies-Europe” category. You can vote for it [here!](#)***



5. Legislative Actions

5.1. New Active Cooperation Regulation has been issued and nominated for the 2024 Antitrust Writing Awards.

The TCA’s new [“Regulation on Active Cooperation for the Purpose of Uncovering Cartels”](#) entered into force on 16.12.2023. The Regulation provides that undertakings and the managers and employees of the undertakings that actively cooperate with the Authority to uncover cartels will not be fined (full immunity) or will receive a reduction in the fines to be imposed (partial immunity), but also includes some important new definitions, time limitations and updated discount rates. The new concepts and regulations introduced by the New Regulation are as follows:

- The definitions of “applicant”, “cartel facilitator”, “cartel party” and “value-added document” have been regulated for the first time.
- It is now possible for cartel intermediaries to apply as cartel facilitators.
- A time limit has been introduced for the reduction of fines. The documents are required to be submitted within three months following the notification of the investigation, provided that it is before the notification of the investigation report in order to benefit from reduction of fines.
- The applicants who cannot benefit from full immunity despite fulfilling the conditions will be granted a reduction in fines and their managers and employees may not be fined if they submit information and documents that constitute value-added evidence.
- With the revised lower and upper limits of the discount rates, although the first applicant is more advantageous as a rule, the parties that apply later may face a higher discount rate, taking into account the timing of the application and the added value provided by the evidence.
- The TCA may consult written and oral information of current and former managers and employees of the applicants.
- The information and documents submitted by the parties whose active cooperation application is not accepted for failing to meet the necessary conditions will be excluded from the scope of the file and will not be used as a basis for the final decision to be taken as a result of the investigation.
- Applications that were made under the Regulation on Active Cooperation but were found to fall under “other violations” upon investigation will still benefit from the Regulation.





6. News from the TCA

6.1. President Mr. Birol KÜle has been reappointed.

Mr. Birol KÜLE has completed his 4-year term of office as of 01.11.2023, and on the same date he was reappointed as the President of the Competition Board.

During his first four-year term, the number of investigations as well as the number of on site inspections showed a sharp increase. While there were 15 and 26 concluded investigations in 2019 and in 2020 respectively, in 2021 this number rose up to 44, and continued to rise to 54 and 58 respectively in 2022 and 2023.

These activities of the TCA had also reflections at the international scale:

- One of the leading news organizations in the field of competition law and policy, MLex, published its [interview](#) with the President KÜle in October. Mr. KÜLE stated in the interview that the Authority fulfilled its duties in the fight against inflation and there were a record number of probes in the sectors which directly affected consumers and which had a significant impact on inflation in the last four years. It is stated in the interview that the TCA has increased its scrutiny against undertakings that engage in anticompetitive practices especially in the retail and labor markets and concerning unnotified mergers and acquisitions.
- The Director of the OECD-GVH Regional Center for Competition, Ms. María CANEDO and Mr. Birol KÜLE had an online meeting on 13.10.2023, where they discussed the methods for possible cooperation. In this productive meeting, Mr. KÜLE and Ms. CANEDO agreed on possible areas of cooperation.
- As a result of this meeting, contributions are made by the TCA to the newsletter published by GVH-OECD RCC where experts from the competition authorities of other countries share their experiences about competition enforcement and advocacy. Also experts from the TCA participate as speakers to the training programmes organized for beneficiary countries by GVH-OECD RCC.

Highlights:

- According to our impact analysis based on the OECD criteria for the years 2021 and 2022, a benefit of 67.3 billion TL (6.55 billion USD) per year is estimated to have been created in consumer welfare, which is equivalent to around 0.72 per cent of Türkiye's GDP. Note that the administrative fines imposed by the Board during the relevant period are not included in this calculation, which, by the way, exceeded 6 billion TL in the 2021-2022 period.





6.2. Competition Council of Turkic States kickstarted.

The Organization of Turkic States (OTS), whose foundations were laid with the Nakhchivan Treaty on October 3, 2009, has risen to prominence in recent years as a remarkable example of regional cooperation. As an important platform promoting closer relations in the Turkic World, OTS members are Türkiye, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan while Hungary, Turkmenistan and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus hold observer status. With the emergence of OTS, a thousand-year-old dream of building a bridge of brotherhood has come true across a vast geography spanning Central Asia-Caucasus-Anatolia and Central Europe.

As a part of this mission, an initiative has been launched by the TCA, in tandem with the General Secretariat of OTS, to bring together the competition authorities of the member states under the same roof. TCA believes the common heritage and kinship as well as historical and cultural ties would facilitate such a gathering and prove to be an occasion to understand and tackle present-day competition law problems, conduct joint studies, exchange information, build trust and thus help competition enforcement culture proliferate in the region. This way, we would also contribute to the cause of the integration of the Turkic World. We should bear in mind how cross border competition policy has been instrumental in achieving free, dynamic and integrated markets across the globe as seen in numerous examples.

The establishment of the Competition Council of Turkic States was officially announced in a meeting attended by the heads of the participating competition authorities, which was held in Istanbul on January 23, 2024. The next meeting will be held in Azerbaijan in September 2024.

Highlights:

- With the establishment of the Competition Council, the goal is to ramp up our cooperation in the field of competition law and policy while at the same time supporting the Turkic World's economic integration, commercial vitality, industrial growth, productivity and innovation; all of which are amongst the goals of OTS as well.





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