

21st ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE GLOBAL COMPETITION LAW CENTRE

COMPETITIVENESS AND MERGER CONTROL: WHAT CHANGES AHEAD?

17-18 April 2026

Bruges

The annual conference will explore whether and how the Union's merger control regime can support the aim to make the European economy more competitive. Many voices in the discussion take a binary (and often self-interested) view on whether merger control is too interventionist or has been too lenient. The annual conference attempts to adopt a more nuanced approach.

DAY 1 – 17 April 9:30 – 18:00

09:30-09:40

Welcome Address

- Ewa OŚNIECKA-TAMECKA, Acting Rector of the College of Europe

09:40-10:00

Presentation of the Conference

- Bernd Meyring; Adina Claiici; Carles Esteva (GCLC)

10:00-10:15

GCLC Best Thesis Award

- Awarded by the Rector and the GCLC President

10:15-11:00

Lecture: Competitiveness and EU Merger Control: past, present, future.

11:00-12:30

- Carles Esteve Mosso, Latham & Watkins and GCLC

First Panel – Defining the challenge: what can “competitiveness” mean for merger control?

The panel will aim to define the objective (competitiveness) from a policy, economic and legal perspective.

Moderator: Beatrice Dumont (College of Europe and Sorbonne)

- *Defining competitiveness (policy)* – Micaela Duffau (Brunswick Group)
- *Defining competitiveness (economics)* – Elisabetta Iossa (AGCM)
- *Legal boundaries: SIEC test, standard and burden of proof (academic perspective)* – Pablo Ibañez Colomo (London School of Economics and College of Europe)
- *Legal boundaries: SIEC test, standard and burden of proof (practitioner perspective)* – Frederic Depoortere (formerly, Skadden)

Voice of the College (Francesco De Fazio), followed by panel discussion and Q&A

12:30-12:45

Online keynote

- Enrico Letta (Dean IE Institute and President of Jacques Delors Institute)

Introduced by Inge Govaere, College of Europe, director of legal studies and GCLC

12:45-13:45

Lunch

13:45-15:00

Second Panel – Case studies: evaluation of merger decisions from a competitiveness angle

The panel will assess recent merger cases through a competitiveness lens and discuss how the investigation could have assessed the impact on competitiveness separately from effective competition.

Moderator: Bernd Meyring (College of Europe)

- *Exchange mergers* – Benoit Durand (RBB)
- *Airline mergers* – Alessia Marrazzo (LEAR)
- *Platform mergers* – Nicolas Petit (European University Institute)
- *Telecoms* – Mike Walker (Frontier Economics)

Voice of the College (Anna Haesaert), followed by panel discussion and Q&A

15:00-16:00

Third Panel – How do mergers affect dynamic competition, investment and innovation?

The panel will focus on dynamic competition, investment and innovation. It will discuss how concentration affects them and then highlight positive and negative effects based on examples.

Moderator: Adina Claiici (College of Europe)

- *How are these effects reflected in merger control?* - Reinhilde Veugelers (KU Leuven)
- *Case studies: harm* – Thomas Deisenhofer (European Commission)
- *Case studies: benefits* – Ana Sofia Rodrigues (Autoridade da Concorrência)
- *The views of the regulator* – Bogdan Chiritoiu (Consiliul Concurentei)

Voice of the College (Manuel Martín Hernández-Abad), followed by panel discussion and Q&A

16:00-16:15

Coffee Break

16:15-17:15

Fourth Panel – Non-horizontal mergers

The panel will focus on non-horizontal mergers and their impact on competitiveness. It will also discuss how positive and negative effects can be balanced.

Moderator: Vanessa Turner (GCLC)

- *Recent trends* – Vitaly Pruzhansky (Independent consultant)
- *Non-horizontal effects (new theories of harm? Ecosystems?)* – Marc Zedler (European Commission)
- *Interaction with horizontal effects* – Ingrid Vandenborre (Skadden)

Voice of the College (Mikolaj Turek), followed by panel discussion and Q&A

17:15-18:00

Keynote speech

Guillaume Lorient (European Commission)

DAY 2 – 18 April 9:00 – 13:15

09:00-10:15

Fifth Panel – Avenues for reform: process

The panel will discuss how procedural changes can promote competitiveness. What changes would promote competitiveness alongside consumer welfare?

Moderator: Assimakis Komninou (GCLC)

- *Standard of proof* – Merit Olthoff (Freshfields)
- *Efficiencies* – Griet Jans (BCA)
- *Remedies* – Grania Holzwarth (Deutsche Telekom)
- *Procedure* – Nicholas Levy (Cleary Gottlieb)

Voice of the College (Andrea Giorgia Navas), followed by panel discussion and Q&A

10:15-10:30

Coffee Break

10:30-11:45

Sixth Panel – Avenues for reform: substance

The panel will focus on different aspects of competitiveness and explore how merger control can promote them.

Moderator: Damien Gerard (College of Europe)

- *Innovation* – Damien Neven (Univ. Lausanne, College of Europe)
- *Investment* – Ethel Fonseca (RBB)
- *Resilience* – Inge Bernaerts (European Commission)
- *Other parameters for assessment (labour, sustainability, ...)* – Claire Simpson (Van Bael & Bellis)

Voice of the College (Sebastian Kruszewski), followed by panel discussion and Q&A

11:45-13:00

Seventh Panel – What to expect: priorities, legislation and judicial control

The panel will conclude the conference with voices from, enforcers judges and specialized members of the press. It will explore the possible short and medium-term impact of the competitiveness debate.

Moderator: Alfonso Lamadrid (College of Europe)

- Suzanne Kingston (General Court, CJEU)
- Lewis Crofts (MLex)
- Nuno Cuhna Rodrigues (Portuguese Competition Authority)
- Hara Nikolopoulou (Hellenic Competition Commission)

Voice of the College (Aramis Sebrechts), followed by panel discussion and Q&A

13:00-13:15

Acknowledgments and end of the Conference