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**DIRECTORATE FOR FINANCIAL AND ENTERPRISE AFFAIRS
COMPETITION COMMITTEE**

Summary of Discussion on Corporate Influence in Competition Policymaking

Annex to the Summary Record of the 146th Meeting of the Competition Committee

20 June 2025

This document prepared by the OECD Secretariat is a detailed Summary of Discussion on Corporate Influence in Competition Policymaking, held by the Competition Committee on 20 June 2025. It presents a factual summary of the views expressed by speakers and delegations that intervened during the discussion.

More documents related to this discussion can be found at:
<https://www.oecd.org/en/events/2025/06/corporate-influence-in-competition-policymaking.html>

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On 20 June 2025, the OECD Competition Committee held a discussion on Corporate Influence in Competition Policymaking chaired by Mr Benoît Cœuré, President of the Autorité de la concurrence.

The **Chair** opened by framing the session as a balancing exercise: exploring both the importance and beneficial role of corporate engagement in competition policymaking, while addressing concerns of undue influence.

The Chair noted that engaging with firms is essential for competition authorities to understand market realities, incentives, and business decision-making, yet concerns persist that firms' financial and legal resources can lead to disproportionate influence and outcomes skewed toward private interests. The Chair welcomed the presence of consumer representatives, noting that the broader conversation includes a range of stakeholders, and not just businesses.

The session was divided in two parts: an open session and a closed session.

The **Secretariat** introduced the OECD note and explained that its aim is to help competition authorities navigate a “grey zone” between legitimate, beneficial corporate engagement and undue influence, while proposing responses that preserve advantages and reduce risks. The note emphasises that corporate engagement is not inherently negative. Instead, it is an integral part of policymaking and can improve the evidence base and implementation effectiveness of policy. Nonetheless, risks can arise where engagement is opaque, manipulative, or disproportionate, with potential harms such as policy capture, distorted enforcement priorities, and eroded public trust.

Given the difficulty of judging undue influence through policy outcomes alone, the note suggests assessing undue influence by examining conduct and process using practical lenses such as transparency, intent, balance of stakeholders in engagement processes, and public perception. While these are not definitive solutions, they offer a practical framework for evaluating influence.

The note then outlines how corporate engagement interfaces with competition policy and where vulnerabilities may arise, for example through the legislative and regulatory framework, enforcement policy or priorities, and the wider public discourse on economic models or frameworks. To counter these vulnerabilities, it then outlines a range of potential responses that jurisdictions could draw on to preserve the benefits of corporate engagement while mitigating the risk of undue influence. Responses are outlined in three categories: transparency and disclosure mechanisms to reduce hidden or opaque conduct; institutional safeguards at authority, national, or international levels; and prohibitions or restrictions on certain types of conduct or funding.

Finally, the note ends by posing several questions, such as whether authorities should adopt stricter policies on engagement with academia and training providers; how national-level collaboration could help; and the possible role of international standards to support common challenges.

Nejla Saula (Acting Division Head, Anti-Corruption and Integrity Division) commended the committee for addressing the issue in the specific context on competition policy and situated the discussion within the OECD's broader work on lobbying and influence. She

noted the evolution from the 2010 Recommendation to the updated 2024 Recommendation on Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying and Influence, which recognises a broader toolbox of influence activities (e.g. funding research, astroturfing) and a wider spectrum of actors beyond professional lobbyists.

She noted that risks such as biased information, opaque funding of think-tanks, and unequal access to policymakers can distort outcomes and undermine democratic trust. She referenced the 2023 OECD survey data that shows that 43% of citizens believe governments would accept corporate demands even if harmful to society, underscoring the importance of perception.

The recommendation is built on three pillars: transparency, integrity, and accountability. It addresses issues such as “revolving doors” and advisory roles, and calls for comprehensive safeguards at the institutional and governmental level. Examples cited included cooling-off rules (e.g., Greece) and the need for disclosure requirements (e.g., for research funding or experts).

Ms Saula noted that progress across countries remains uneven, with gaps in lobbying registers and transparency over indirect influence. Neila concluded by highlighting OECD standards for responsible corporate engagement and ongoing work to develop sector-specific guidance.

Professor Ioannis Lianos (UCL) examined the intersection of corporate influence and academic research, warning that industry funding has become pervasive in competition policy discourse. He distinguished between consultancy markets and the “marketplace of ideas,” noting that opaque funding can create material financial bias, eroding trust in research.

Professor Lianos noted that, unlike courtroom contexts, where admissibility standards and duties to the court curb partisanship, broader policy debates lack comparable mechanisms. He proposed several solutions including: systematically discounting conflicted research in academic evaluations; stronger transparency for data-access agreements with private providers; asymmetric “sunshine” regulation requiring corporations and business groups to disclose payments to consultants, experts, and academic institutions; and a “matching obligation,” under which corporate funding of regulatory science would be paired with commensurate contributions to independent, peer-reviewed projects. These measures aim to restore intellectual diversity and counterbalance years of unregulated corporate influence.

BIAC clarified that they do not endorse improper influence and supports lawful, transparent engagement. They cautioned against overemphasising terminology such as “undue influence,” advocating instead for a focus on wrongful conduct. Influence, they argued, comes from multiple sources, including political actors and civil society, and all of these should be scrutinised equally. BIAC argued that input should be assessed on quality rather than volume or funding and noted that competition authorities are experienced in weighing evidence critically. The speaker supported transparency measures for experts but warned against suppressing corporate input, calling such suppression undemocratic and counterproductive; instead, authorities should reject poor advocacy while respecting the right of businesses to participate.

Speaking from the perspective of European consumer organisations, **BEUC** highlighted the financial imbalance between corporate and civil society lobbying, noting that indirect, opaque influence, such as funding think-tanks or paying academics, can pose risks.

BEUC focused on practical transparency steps to counteract distortions from indirect, opaque influence: proposed two practical measures: requiring speakers at conferences and

consultations to disclose specific interests and funding, and encouraging authorities to consider non-participation in events where organisers fail to enforce disclosure rules.

These steps aim to enhance transparency and allow participants to contextualise contributions and reduce the risk of single, paid-for viewpoints risk dominating discourse.

The **Chair** thanked all speakers for their insightful contributions and emphasised the need for practical safeguards to preserve the benefits of engagement while mitigating risks. The discussion underscored the complexity of distinguishing legitimate input from undue influence and highlighted transparency, accountability, and balanced stakeholder representation as central themes for future policy development.

Chinese Taipei asked whether a collegiate, commissioner-based agency structure is more resistant to undue influence than a single-leader model. Professor Lianos responded that decision-making boards are common in competition authorities precisely to lower risks of undue influence, and that larger, diverse boards—possibly with stakeholder-proposed candidates—can help. Ms Saula added that, irrespective of structure, robust transparency and conflict-of-interest rules, including during nomination processes, are essential to protect independence.

Germany reflected on experience within the International Competition Network (ICN), where non-governmental advisors historically contributed diverse perspectives. It noted growing concerns about transparency of such contributions and that some ICN members have revised policies or reduced participation. Germany encouraged cross-learning between the OECD and ICN.

The **Chair** asked whether transparency alone is sufficient, noting that biased or selectively presented research—though disclosed—can still skew decisions if authorities must rely on it under time constraints. Professor Lianos agreed that transparency is necessary but not sufficient; he reiterated the need for mechanisms that promote plurality and a balanced marketplace of ideas.

The rest of the session was closed, therefore not included in this unclassified document.