

World Competition Day helps CCP create awareness of Competition Law in Pakistan

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The events to mark the World Competition Day (WCD) have become an annual feature in the Commission's advocacy calendar, as it provides an important platform for interaction with academia, business leaders, lawyers, senior government functionaries and sector regulators. Since competition law is relatively new in Pakistan, it is important to highlight its importance and activities, and the WCD provide us with an opportunity to raise awareness regarding competition law, the Commission's role in competition enforcement, and also to obtain feedback on our performance and learn from experts and participants.

CCP commemorated WCD with a seminar for the third consecutive year on 5th December, 2014 in Islamabad. The previous two seminars centered on the themes of cartelization and the role of competition in economic growth respectively. This year's seminar focused on: a) Unfair trade practices and the loss to consumer welfare; and b) Public restraints and their impact on competition.

Dr. Joseph Wilson, former Acting Chairman CCP, in his welcome address informed the audience that the World Competition Day celebrates the adoption of the Set of Multilaterally Agreed Equitable Principles and Rules for the Control of Restrictive Business Practices, approved by the United Nations Conference on Restrictive Business Practices, on the 5th of December 1980, in its thirty-fifth session, through resolution 35/63. He noted that *"the promulgation of competition law in Pakistan, among other reasons, is in fulfillment of the UN Resolution 35/63 of the 5th December 1980"*.

The keynote speaker, Mr. Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, EU Ambassador to Pakistan, shared the experience of the EU, and said that greater regional integration had led to larger markets and new trading opportunities, increased competition and lowered prices for consumers. He therefore advised the Pakistani government to increase trade with its neighbours, as successful regional integration would improve security and stability in the region.

"The session on "Unfair Trade Practices and Loss to Consumer Welfare" discussed the correlation between competition and consumer welfare; the potential benefits of a competitive economy for consumers; and the impact of anti-competitive practices of businesses on prices, quality, availability of goods, and on other businesses. With regards to curbing deceptive marketing practices, the Commission announced to launch its disclosure campaign for businesses in the near future."

The session on "Public Restraints and their Impact on Competition" discussed various regulatory barriers, state subsidies, exemptions granted to incumbent firms through Statutory Regulatory Orders (SROs), and how competition is hampered as a result of such public restraints. In 2014, the focus of the CCP has been mainly the advocacy with the government, as it was important to review the effects of government regulation and actions on competition.

The seminar was also addressed by the federal minister of finance, Mr. Ishaq Dar, who assured the audience that the government was in the process of reviewing all concessionary exemptions granted to businesses. He advised the Commission to work with consumer protection societies to effectively detect cartels and unfair trade practices. Competition also sends a positive signal to foreign investors. When foreign investors observe that the government is serious in implementing the competition regime, i.e., it will not be providing domestic entities with preferential treatment over others, they will be confident in investing in Pakistan, the Minister said adding that the CCP had the support of the Government in discharging of its statutory obligations, he said while congratulating the CCP for organizing the seminar.

CCP hopes to continue commemorating WCD to make sure we remember how the journey of promoting and ensuring competition began, and to further increase the awareness of competition law and practice in Pakistan.