

Building Competition Institutions for Sustainable Growth

A Retrospective on the Role of Competition Law and Policy in Central and Eastern Europe 20 years after EU Enlargement and Lessons for the Future

May 27th, 2025

Library of the University of Warsaw, ul. Dobra 56/66, Warszawa, Room 316 (3rd Floor)

Co-organisers: Maciej Bernatt (CARs, University of Warsaw) & Ioannis Lianos (UCL, ICF)

Organizing institutions: [University College London](#), [University of Warsaw](#), [Inclusive Competition](#), ASCOLA Central Europe Chapter

Conference's partner: Office of Competition and Consumer Protection, Poland (UOKiK)

The recently published Draghi report on EU competition policy's future has ignited intense discussion among experts, particularly regarding its proposals to modernize EU competition law. While some view EU competition enforcement as hindering industrial policy and growth initiatives, this perspective overlooks competition policy's broader role. In today's era of entrepreneurial states and mission-driven economies, competition policy serves to both create and shape markets, fostering innovation and competitiveness.

The transformation of Central and Eastern European (CEE) Member States over the past two decades since joining the EU exemplifies how growth-oriented policies can harmoniously coexist with competition protection and market access initiatives. Despite being sometimes portrayed as Europe's economic periphery, these nations have achieved remarkable progress: their real GDP per capita has doubled or significantly increased, while both nominal and real wages have grown at rates substantially exceeding the EU average. Simultaneously, these countries implemented market liberalization policies and strengthened their competitive frameworks through the establishment of independent competition authorities.

This conference seeks to examine these developments in detail, analyzing the key components of this largely successful transformation while acknowledging persistent challenges and shortcomings. Moreover, it aims to extract valuable insights for the broader EU dialogue on competition law enforcement and policy's role within the new EU sustainable growth and innovation framework proposed by the Draghi report.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

9.30 Welcome

Alojzy Z. Nowak, Rector of the University of Warsaw

Tomasz Chróstny, President of Polish Competition Authority (UOKiK)

Chair: Maciej Bernatt (University of Warsaw, CARS WZ UW)

9.45 – 11.20 Panel 1: Sustainable Growth, Innovation and Competition: Delivering for the New EU Social Contract

The panel will explore how competition law enforcement has evolved to incorporate sustainability objectives, innovation promotion, and growth stimulation across all domains - antitrust enforcement, merger review, state aid control and the institution of new competition tools. Special attention will be given to the Central and Eastern European experience in competition law implementation and advocacy, examining how these efforts have contributed to the region's remarkable economic transformation over the past twenty years, characterized by substantial growth, technological advancement, and improved living standards and how the establishment of new competition tools may further enhance these positive results towards sustainable growth and higher added value economic activities. The discussion will draw insights from specific cases and initiatives that highlight the complementary relationship between robust competition law enforcement and sustainable growth and innovation.

Speakers:

Aleksandra Boutin, Positive Competition, Berkeley Research Group

Giorgio Monti, University of Tilburg

Jan Polański, Polish Competition Authority (UOKiK)

Marcin Waligóra, Frontier Economics

Chair: Ioannis Lianos, UCL

11.20-11.35 Break

11.35 – 12.50 Panel 2: Transforming Public Institutions: The Role of Competition Authorities

The transformation of Central and Eastern European countries over the past two decades has been marked by their pivotal shift from centrally administered economies to open market systems supported by democratic institutions. This panel will examine how competition authorities have shaped this institutional metamorphosis, exploring their influence on market liberalisation, regulatory reform, and the cultivation of competitive business environments. Through comparative analysis of different jurisdictions, we will uncover both success stories and challenges faced during this transition, offering valuable lessons about the role of competition policy in economic transformation. Particularly will be examined challenges in preserving NCAs independence vis a vis governments, and challenges regarding insufficient resources/budgetary constraints they often face. Special attention will also be given to how these authorities navigated inherited monopolistic structures, fostered new market entrants, and developed effective enforcement capabilities while building public trust in market mechanisms.

Speakers:

Frederic Jenny, ESSEC

Andrej Matvoz, Slovenian Competition Authority (AVK)

Kamil Nejezchleb, Czech Competition Authority (UOHS)

Jasminka Pecotic Kaufman, University of Zagreb

Chair: Maciej Bernatt, UW

12.50 -13.50 Lunch break

13.50 – 14.30 Keynote speech: Inge Bernaets, European Commission

Chair: Ioannis Lianos (UCL, ICF)

14.30 – 15.50 Panel 3: Competition and the State: 20 years after EU enlargement: re-conceptualizing the interaction between competition law and government activities

Competition law enforcement targeting state activities has been instrumental in the institutional transformation of Central and Eastern European Member States. This panel will examine landmark cases where competition authorities challenged state-imposed restrictions on market competition, including regulatory barriers, state-owned enterprise conduct, and anticompetitive subsidies. Through detailed case analysis, we will explore the critical intersection between public procurement rules and competition law, as well as competition authorities' advocacy efforts in reforming the public sector. Drawing from two decades of enforcement experience across CEE jurisdictions, we will distill key insights about effectively promoting competitive markets while managing state involvement in the economy. Particular attention will be given to innovative enforcement approaches and their impact on market liberalization and institutional reform.

Speakers:

Gabor Gal, Hungarian Competition Authority (GVH)

Sarunas Keserauskas, Vilnius University and Ellex Valiunas

Krystyna Kowalik-Bańczyk, Polish Academy of Sciences, judge of the General Court

Juraj Sýrny, Slovak Competition Authority (PMU)

Chair: Agata Jurkowska-Gomułka, CARS WZ UW

15.50-16.10 Break

16.10 – 17.30 Panel 4: Sustainability, Resilience, Innovation and Competition in the Food Value Chain: Towards a New Equilibrium in an uncertain world?

The enforcement of competition law in agriculture and the broader food sector has emerged as a critical priority for competition authorities across Central and Eastern Europe. This panel will analyze how competition enforcement has reshaped national food systems and examine the impact of increasing global consolidation throughout the food value chain. We will explore different regulatory approaches aimed at balancing multiple objectives: affordability of food, food system resilience, environmental sustainability, competitive markets, and innovation promotion. Through comparative analysis of specific cases and initiatives, we will evaluate the effectiveness of various policy interventions, highlighting successful strategies while identifying persistent challenges. Particular attention will be given to novel enforcement tools and policy frameworks that have proven effective in promoting both competition and sustainability in food markets.

Speakers:

Piotr Adamczewski, Polish Competition Authority (UOKiK)

Zombor Berezvai, Hungarian Competition Authority (GVH)

Martin Janda, Austrian Competition Authority (BWB)

Magdalena Knapp, University of Warsaw

Chair: Małgorzata Kozak, University of Utrecht

17.30 -17.45 Conclusions

Maciej Bernatt (UW) & Ioannis Lianos (UCL, ICF)

17.45 – 20.00 Cocktail Reception, Gardens of the Library of the University of Warsaw