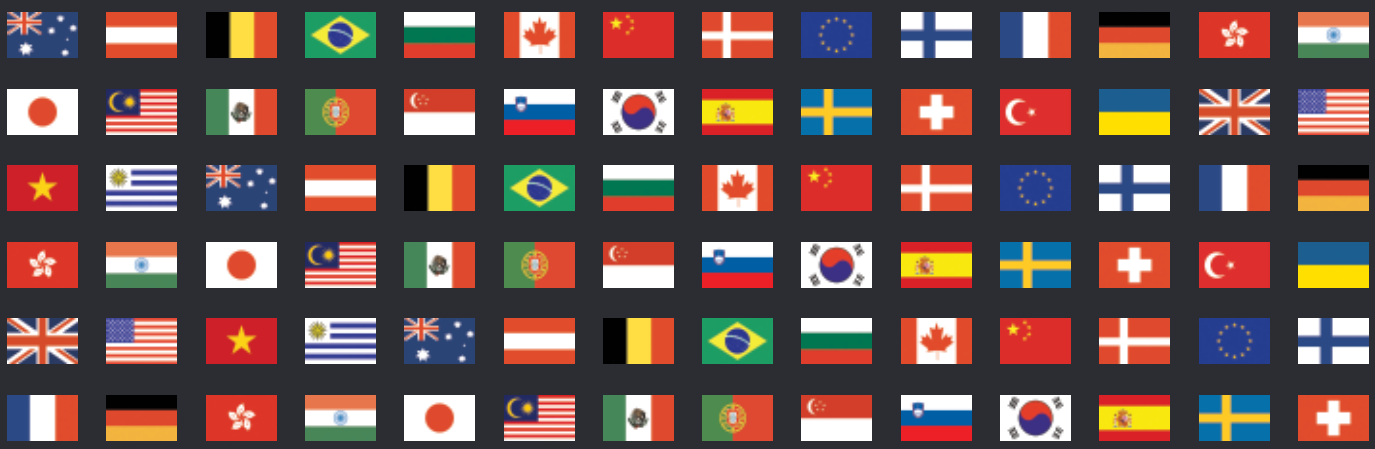
Cartel Regulation 2021

Contributing editor
Neil Campbell



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Getting The Deal Through

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Publisher
Tom Barnes
tom.barnes@lbresearch.com

Subscriptions
Claire Bagnall
claire.bagnall@lbresearch.com

Senior business development manager
Adam Sargent
adam.sargent@gettingthedealthrough.com

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Neil Campbell
McMillan LLP

Lexology Getting The Deal Through is delighted to publish the twenty-first edition of *Cartel Regulation*, which is available in print and online at www.lexology.com/gtdt.

Lexology Getting The Deal Through provides international expert analysis in key areas of law, practice and regulation for corporate counsel, cross-border legal practitioners, and company directors and officers.

Throughout this edition, and following the unique Lexology Getting The Deal Through format, the same key questions are answered by leading practitioners in each of the jurisdictions featured. Our coverage this year includes new chapters on Argentina, Bulgaria, France and Spain.

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Every effort has been made to cover all matters of concern to readers. However, specific legal advice should always be sought from experienced local advisers.

Lexology Getting The Deal Through gratefully acknowledges the efforts of all the contributors to this volume, who were chosen for their recognised expertise. We also extend special thanks to the contributing editor, Neil Campbell of McMillan LLP, for his continued assistance with this volume.

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Turkey

Gönenç Gürkaynak and K Korhan Yıldırım
ELIG Gürkaynak Attorneys-at-Law

LEGISLATION AND INSTITUTIONS

Relevant legislation

1 | What is the relevant legislation?

The relevant legislation on cartel regulation is the Law on Protection of Competition No. 4054 of 13 December 1994 (the Competition Law). The Competition Law finds its underlying rationale in article 167 of the Turkish Constitution of 1982, which authorises the government to take appropriate measures and actions to secure a free market economy. The applicable provision for cartel-specific cases is article 4 of the Competition Law, which lays down the basic principles of cartel regulation.

After rounds of revisions and failed attempts of enactment over a span of several years, a proposed amendment to the Competition Law (the Amendment Proposal) has been approved by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (the Turkish parliament). On 16 June 2020, the amendments passed through the parliament and entered into force on 24 June 2020 (the Amendment Law), which was published in Official Gazette on 23 June 2020, No. 31165. According to the recital of the Amendment Proposal, these amendments add the Authority's experience of more than 20 years of enforcement to the Competition Law and bring it closer to European Union law.

Relevant institutions

2 | Which authority investigates cartel matters? Is there a separate prosecution authority? Are cartel matters adjudicated or determined by the enforcement agency, a separate tribunal or the courts?

The national authority for investigating cartel matters in Turkey is the Competition Authority. The Competition Authority has administrative and financial autonomy and consists of the Competition Board (the Board), presidency and service departments. Five divisions with sector-specific work distribution handle enforcement of the Competition Law through approximately 130 case handlers. A research department, a decisions unit, an information-management unit, an external-relations unit, a management services unit, and a strategy development unit assist the five technical divisions and the presidency. As the competent body of the Competition Authority, the Board is responsible for, among other things, investigating and condemning cartel activity. The Board consists of seven independent members. If a cartel activity amounts to a criminally prosecutable act, such as bid rigging in public tenders, it may be separately adjudicated and prosecuted by Turkish penal courts and public prosecutors.

Changes

3 | Have there been any recent changes, or proposals for change, to the regime?

One of the most important amendments in the Amendment Law is the introduction of a de minimis principle, bringing Turkish competition law closer to that of EU law. This amendment enables the Board to decide against launching full-fledged investigations into agreements, concerted practices and decisions of associations of undertakings that do not exceed thresholds determined by the Board (eg, a certain market share level or turnover). This principle does not apply to hardcore violations such as price-fixing, territory or customer sharing, or restriction of supply. With this new mechanism, the Turkish Competition Authority appears to be steering its direction, and public resources, towards investigating significant violations.

The introduction of the de minimis principle appears to be a more appropriate (and legally less controversial) measure for the Authority to prioritise cases, which has previously used article 9(3) of the Competition Law to terminate a pre-investigation on procedural efficiency grounds, such as when an infringement only affects a small market (eg, the *Izmir Container Transporters* decision, (20-01/3-2, 02.01.2020). Article 9(3), however, is an interim measure the Board may use to explain to companies how to terminate an infringement until its final decision is made. It still remains to be seen whether the introduction of the de minimis exception will end the excessive use of article 9(3) altogether, given that hardcore restrictions in small markets will still not benefit from the de minimis provision. The Amendment Law refers to 'turnover' and 'market share' thresholds for the de minimis exceptions but leaves the setting of thresholds to the Board. It is therefore not yet clear how the Board will define the limits of the safe harbour the new law has introduced. That said, given the goal of the Amendment Law is to bring the Competition Law closer to EU law, it would be fair to expect that the threshold will be based on the European Commission's Notice on agreements of minor importance that do not appreciably restrict competition under article 101(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (the De Minimis Notice). The Commission also has another Notice on the Effect on Trade, (Commission Notice — Guidelines on the effect on trade concept contained in articles 81 and 82 of the Treaty; OJ C 101, 27.4.2004, p. 81–96), which provides that even agreements including a restriction by object may fall outside the scope of article 101 TFEU if the parties' combined market share is 5 per cent or less and their aggregate annual turnover is €40 million or less. Given that the Amendment Law excludes hardcore restrictions from the safe harbour, however, the Authority may have been more heavily influenced by the De Minimis Notice in preparation of the Amendment Law rather than the Notice on the Effect on Trade. The De Minimis Notice could be a reference point for the Board to determine the de minimis threshold for Turkish law.

The Amendment Law brought about other significant changes, such as the introduction of settlement and commitment mechanisms.

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There is also the amended Guidelines on Vertical Agreements, which was published on 30 March 2018, which includes provisions concerning internet sales and most favoured customer clauses.

Currently, an expected and significant development in Turkish competition law is the Draft Regulation on Administrative Monetary Fines for the Infringement of the Competition Law, which is set to replace the Regulation on Monetary Fines for Restrictive Agreements, Concerted Practices, Decisions and Abuse of Dominance (the Regulation on Fines). The draft regulation is heavily inspired by the European Commission's guidelines on the method of setting fines imposed pursuant to article 23(2)(a) of Regulation 1/2003. The draft regulation was sent to the Turkish parliament on 17 January 2014, but no enactment date has been announced as yet. However, its introduction demonstrates the Competition Authority's intention to bring secondary legislation in line with EU competition law during the harmonisation process.

Finally, the following key legislative texts were announced or enacted between 2013 and the time of writing:

- Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2016/5 on R&D Agreements;
- Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2017/3 on Vertical Agreements in the Motor Vehicle Sector;
- Communiqué No. 2017/2 Amending the Communiqué on Mergers and Acquisitions Calling for the Authorisation of the Competition Board (Communiqué No:2010/4);
- Communiqué on the Increase of the Lower Threshold for Administrative Fines Specified in paragraph 1, article 16 of Act No. 4054 on the Protection of Competition (Communiqué No. 2019/1);
- Guidelines Explaining the Block Exemption Communiqué on Vertical Agreements in the Motor Vehicle Sector (Communiqué No 2017/3) enacted on 7 March 2017;
- Guidelines on the Evaluation of the Abuse of Dominance through Discriminatory Practices, enacted on 7 April 2014;
- Guidelines on Exclusionary Abusive Conducts by Companies in Dominant Positions, enacted on 29 January 2014;
- Block Exemption Communiqué on Specialisation Agreements (Communiqué No. 2013/3), entered into force on 26 July 2013;
- Guidelines on Undertakings Concerned, Turnover and Ancillary Restraints in Mergers and Acquisitions, enacted on 26 March 2013;
- Guidelines on Active Cooperation for the Exposure of Cartels, enacted on 17 April 2013;
- Guidelines on the Protection of Horizontal Agreements in line with articles 4 and 5 of the Competition Law, Act No. 4054, enacted on 30 April 2013;
- Guidelines on the Assessment of Horizontal Mergers and Acquisitions, enacted on 4 June 2013;
- Guidelines on the Assessment of Non-horizontal Mergers and Acquisitions, enacted on 4 June 2013;
- Guidelines on Cases Considered as Merger and Acquisition and Concept of Control, enacted on 16 July 2013; and
- Guidelines on General Principles of Exemption, enacted on 28 November 2013.

Substantive law

4 | What is the substantive law on cartels in the jurisdiction?

Article 4 of the Competition Law is akin to and closely modelled on article 101(1) of the TFEU (formerly article 81(1) of the EC Treaty). It prohibits all agreements between undertakings, decisions by associations of undertakings and concerted practices that have (or may have) as their object or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within a Turkish product or services market or a part thereof. Article 4 does not bring a definition of 'cartel'. Rather, it prohibits all forms of restrictive agreements, which would include any form of cartel agreement. Similar to the TFEU, the Amendment Law introduced the de minimis principle, whereby the Board will be able to decide to not launch full-fledged investigations into agreements, concerted practices and decisions of association of undertakings that do not exceed the thresholds determined by the Board (eg, a certain market share level or turnover).

Article 4 prohibits agreements that restrict competition by object or effect. The assessment whether the agreement restricts competition by object is based on the content of the agreement, the objectives it attains and the economic and legal context. The parties' intention is irrelevant to the finding of liability but it may operate as an aggravating or mitigating factor, depending on circumstances. Article 4 also prohibits any form of agreement that has the potential to prevent, restrict or distort competition. Again, this is a specific feature of the Turkish cartel regulation system, recognising a broad discretionary power of the Board. Both actual and potential effects are taken into account. Pursuant to the Guidelines on Horizontal Cooperation Agreements, the restrictive effects are assessed on the basis of their adverse impact on at least one of the parameters of the competition in the market, such as price, output, quality, product variety or innovation. Article 4 brings a non-exhaustive list of restrictive agreements that is, to a large extent, the same as article 101(1) TFEU. The list includes examples such as price-fixing, market allocation and refusal-to-deal agreements. A number of horizontal restrictive agreement types, such as price-fixing, market allocation, collective refusals to deal (group boycotts) and bid rigging, have consistently been deemed to be per se illegal. Certain other types of competitor agreements such as vertical agreements and purchasing cartels are generally subject to a competitive effects test.

The prohibition on restrictive agreements and practices does not apply to agreements that benefit from a block exemption or an individual exemption (or both) issued by the Board. The applicable block exemption rules are:

- Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2002/2 on Vertical Agreements;
- Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2017/3 on Vertical Agreements and Concerted Practices in the Motor Vehicle Sector;
- Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2008/3 for the Insurance Sector;
- Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2008/2 on Technology Transfer Agreements;
- Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2013/3 on Specialisation Agreements; and
- Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2016/5 on R&D Agreements.

These are all modelled on their respective equivalents in the EU. The most recent of these block exemptions – Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2017/3 on Vertical Agreements in the Motor Vehicle Sector – sets out revised rules for the motor vehicle sector in Turkey, overhauling Block Exemption Communiqué No. 2005/4 for Vertical Agreements and Concerted Practices in the Motor Vehicle Sector. Restrictive agreements that do not benefit from the block exemption under the relevant communiqué or an individual exemption issued by the Board are caught by the prohibition in article 4.

The Turkish antitrust regime also condemns concerted practices, and the Competition Authority easily shifts the burden of proof in connection with concerted practice allegations through a mechanism called 'the presumption of concerted practice'.

Joint ventures and strategic alliances

5 | To what extent are joint ventures and strategic alliances potentially subject to the cartel laws?

Under Turkish Competition Law, the competitive assessment of joint ventures falls between merger control and cartel regulation. Depending on the full-function character of a joint venture, it can be subject to either merger control or a general antitrust assessment.

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If a joint venture is found to be a full-function joint venture, it will be subject to merger control regime under article 7 of the Competition Law, if the applicable turnover thresholds are met. However, if the joint venture is considered to be non-full-function, it would be subject to an article 4 test to see if it has an anticompetitive purpose or effect, and therefore would be subject to cartel regulation.

APPLICATION OF THE LAW AND JURISDICTIONAL REACH

Application of the law

6 | Does the law apply to individuals, corporations and other entities?

The Law on Protection of Competition No. 4054 of 13 December 1994 (the Competition Law) applies to 'undertakings' and 'associations of undertakings'. An undertaking is defined as a single integrated economic unit capable of acting independently in the market to produce, market or sell goods and services. The Competition Law therefore applies to individuals, corporations and other entities alike acting as an undertaking.

Extraterritoriality

7 | Does the regime apply to conduct that takes place outside the jurisdiction (including indirect sales into the jurisdiction)? If so, on what jurisdictional basis?

Turkey is one of the 'effect theory' jurisdictions where what matters is whether the cartel activity has produced effects on Turkish markets, regardless of the nationality of the cartel members, where the cartel activity took place or whether the members have a subsidiary in Turkey. The Board has refrained from declining jurisdiction over non-Turkish cartels or cartel members in the past, as long as there has been an effect on the Turkish markets (eg, The suppliers of rail freight forwarding services for block trains and cargo train services, 16 December 2015,15-44/740-267; Güneş Ekspres/Condor, 27 October 2011, 11-54/1431-507; Imported Coal, 2 September 2010, 10-57/1141-430; Refrigerator Compressor, 1 July 2009; 09-31/668-156). It should be noted, however, that the Board is yet to enforce monetary or other sanctions against firms located outside of Turkey that lacks a presence in Turkey, mostly due to enforcement handicaps (such as difficulties of formal service or failure to identify a tax number). The specific circumstances surrounding indirect sales are not tried under Turkish cartel rules. Article 2 of the Competition Law would support at least a convincing argument that the Turkish cartel regime does not extend to indirect sales because the cartel activity that takes place outside of Turkey does not in and of itself produce effects in Turkey.

The Board finds the underlying basis of its jurisdiction in article 2 of the Competition Law, which captures all restrictive agreements, decisions, transactions and practices to the extent they produce an effect on a Turkish market, regardless of where the conduct takes place.

Export cartels

8 | Is there an exemption or defence for conduct that only affects customers or other parties outside the jurisdiction?

It is fair to say that export cartels do not fall within the scope of the Competition Authority's jurisdiction, as per article 2 of the Competition Law. In Poultry Meat Producers (25 November 2009, 09–57/1393–362), the Authority launched an investigation into allegations that included, among other things, an export cartel. The Board decided that export cartels could not sanctioned unless they affected the host country's markets. Although some other decisions (Paper Recycling, 8 July 2013, 13–42/538–238) suggest that the Competition Authority might sometimes be inclined to claim jurisdiction over export cartels, it is fair to assume that an export cartel would fall outside of the Competition Authority's jurisdiction if and to the extent it does not produce an impact on Turkish markets.

Industry-specific provisions

9 | Are there any industry-specific infringements? Are there any industry-specific defences or exemptions?

There are no industry-specific offences or defences. The Competition Law applies to all industries, without exception. There are sector-specific block exemption rules, but these do not define any industry-specific offences or defences that do not exist in the Competition Law but detail slightly different rules for the block exemption regulations. One such regulation exists in the motor vehicle sector (Block Exemption Communiqué No 2017/3 on Vertical Agreements in the Motor Vehicles Sector) (Communiqué No 2017/3)). Accordingly, in cases that concern the motor vehicle sector's block exemption, both the defending undertaking and the Authority would consider the thresholds and rules specified within Communiqué No 2017/3.

To the extent that they act as an undertaking within the meaning of the Competition Law, state-owned entities also fall within the scope of application of article 4.

Owing to the 'presumption of concerted practice', oligopoly markets for the supply of homogeneous products (eg, cement, bread yeast and ready-mixed concrete) have constantly been under investigation for concerted practices. Nevertheless, whether this track record (more than 32 investigations in the cement and ready-mixed concrete markets in 21 years of enforcement history) leads to an industry-specific offence is debatable.

Government-approved conduct

10 | Is there a defence or exemption for state actions, government-approved activity or regulated conduct?

There are no defences or exemptions for state-approved or regulated actions.

There are sector-specific antitrust exemptions. The block exemptions applicable in the motor vehicle sector and in the insurance sector are notable examples. The Competition Law does not provide any specific exceptions to government–sanctioned activities or regulated conduct.

However, there are examples where the Board taken an undertaking's defence that it was acting in a state-approved or regulated manner into account (eg, *Paper Recycling*, 8 July 2013, 13–42/538–238; *Waste Accumulator*, 4 October 2012, 12–48/1415–476; *Pharmaceuticals*, 2 March 2012, 12–09/290–91; *Et–Balık Kurumu*, 16 June 2011, 11–37/785–248; *Türkiye Şöförler ve Otomobilciler Federasyonu*, 3 March 1999, 99–12/91–33; *Esgaz*, 9 August 2012, 12–41/1171–384).

INVESTIGATIONS

Steps in an investigation

11 | What are the typical steps in an investigation?

The Board is entitled to launch an investigation into an alleged cartel activity ex officio or in response to a complaint. In the case of a complaint, the Board rejects the notice or complaint if it deems it not to be serious. Any notice or complaint is deemed rejected if the Board remains silent for 60 days. The Board conducts a pre-investigation if it finds the notice or complaint to be serious. At this preliminary stage, unless there is a dawn raid, the undertakings concerned are not notified that they are under investigation. Dawn raids (unannounced on-site inspections) and other investigatory tools (eg, formal information request letters) are

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used during this pre-investigation process. The preliminary report of the Competition Authority experts will be submitted to the Board within 30 days after a pre-investigation decision is taken by the Board. The Board will then decide within 10 days whether to launch a formal investigation. If the Board decides to initiate an investigation, it will send a notice to the undertakings concerned within 15 days. The investigation will be completed within six months. If deemed necessary, this period may be extended, once only, for an additional period of up to six months by the Board.

The investigated undertakings have 30 calendar days as of the formal service of the notice to prepare and submit their first written defences (first written defence). Subsequently, the main investigation report is issued by the Competition Authority. Once the main investigation report is served on the defendants, they have 30 calendar days to respond, extendable for a further 30 days (second written defence). The investigation committee will then have 15 days to prepare an opinion concerning the second written defence. The defending parties will have another 30-day period to reply to the additional opinion (third written defence). When the parties' responses to the additional opinion are served on the Competition Authority, the investigation process will be completed (the written phase of investigation involving claim or defence exchange will close with the submission of the third written defence). An oral hearing may be held ex officio or upon request by the parties. Oral hearings are held within at least 30 and at most 60 days following the completion of the investigation process under the provisions of Communiqué No. 2010/2 on Oral Hearings Before the Board. The Board will render its final decision within 15 calendar days of the hearing if an oral hearing is held, or within 30 calendar days of completion of the investigation process if no oral hearing is held.

The appeal must be brought within 60 calendar days of the reasoned decision being officially served. It usually takes around three to eight months from the announcement of the final decision for the Board to serve a reasoned decision on an appeal.

Investigative powers of the authorities

12 What investigative powers do the authorities have? Is court approval required to invoke these powers?

The Board may request all information it deems necessary from all public institutions and organisations, undertakings and trade associations. Officials of these bodies, undertakings and trade associations are obliged to provide the necessary information within the period fixed by the Board. Failure to comply with a decision ordering the production of information may lead to the imposition of a turnover-based fine of 0.1 per cent of the turnover generated in the financial year preceding the date of the fining decision (if this is not calculable, the turnover generated in the financial year nearest to the date of the fining decision will be taken into account). The minimum fine is 31,903 Turkish liras (Communiqué on the Increase of the Lower Threshold for Administrative Fines Specified in paragraph 1, article 16 of Act No. 4054 on the Protection of Competition (Communiqué No. 2020/1)). In cases where incorrect or incomplete information has been provided in response to a request for information, the same penalty may be imposed.

Article 15 of the Competition Law also authorises the Board to conduct on-site investigations and dawn raids. Accordingly, the Board is entitled to:

- examine the books, paperwork and documents of undertakings and trade associations, and, if necessary, make copies of the same;
- request undertakings and trade associations to provide written or verbal explanations on specific topics; and
- conduct on-site investigations with regard to any asset of an undertaking.

Refusal to grant the staff of the Competition Authority access to business premises may lead to the imposition of a fixed fine of 0.5 per cent of the Turkish turnover generated in the financial year preceding the date of the fining decision (if this is not calculable, the Turkish turnover generated in the financial year nearest to the date of the fining decision will be taken into account). It may also lead to the imposition of a fine of 0.05 per cent of the Turkish turnover generated in the financial year preceding the date of the fining decision, for each day of the violation (if this is not calculable, the Turkish turnover generated in the financial year nearest to the date of the fining decision will be taken into account).

The Competition Law provides vast authority to the Competition Authority on dawn raids. Judicial authorisation is obtained by the Board only if the subject undertaking refuses to allow the dawn raid. Other than that, the Competition Authority does not need to obtain judicial authorisation to use its powers. While the wording of the Law is such that employees can be compelled to give verbal testimony, case handlers do allow a delay in giving an answer so long as there is a quick written follow-up correspondence. Therefore, in practice, employees can avoid providing answers on issues that are uncertain to them, provided that a written response is submitted within a mutually agreed time. Computer records are fully examined by the experts of the Competition Authority, including, but not limited, to deleted items.

In addition to the above, the Amendment Law also includes an explicit provision that during on-site inspections, the Authority can inspect and make copies of all information and documents in the companies' physical records and those in electronic storage and IT systems, which the Authority already does in practice. This is also confirmed in the Amendment Proposal's preamble as it indicates that the amendment serves 'further' clarification on the powers of the Authority that are particularly important for discovering cartels. Based on the Authority's current practice, therefore, this does not constitute a novelty.

Officials conducting an on-site investigation must be in possession of a deed of authorisation from the Board. The deed of authorisation must specify the subject matter and purpose of the investigation. The inspectors are not entitled to exercise their investigative powers (copying records, recording statements by company staff, etc) in relation to matters that do not fall within the scope of the investigation (that is, that which is written on the deed of authorisation).

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Inter-agency cooperation

13 Is there cooperation with authorities in other jurisdictions? If so, what is the legal basis for, and extent of, such cooperation?

Article 43 of Decision No. 1/95 of the EC–Turkey Association Council (Decision No. 1/95) authorises the Competition Authority to notify and request the European Commission's Directorate-General for Competition to apply relevant measures if the Board believes that cartels organised in the territory of the European Union adversely affect competition in Turkey. The provision grants reciprocal rights and obligations to the parties (the EU and Turkey), and thus the European Commission has the authority to request the Board to apply relevant measures to restore competition in relevant markets.

There are also a number of bilateral cooperation agreements between the Competition Authority and the competition agencies in other jurisdictions (eg, Romania, Korea, Bulgaria, Portugal, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Russia, Croatia and Mongolia) on cartel enforcement matters. The Competition Authority also has close ties with the OECD, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, World Trade Organization, the International Competition Network and the World Bank.

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The research department of the Competition Authority makes periodic consultations with relevant domestic and foreign institutions and organisations about the protection of competition in order to assess their results, and submits its recommendations to the Board. As an example, a cooperation protocol was signed on 14 October 2009 between the Turkish Competition Authority and the Turkish Public Procurement Authority in order to procure a healthy competition environment with regard to public tenders by cooperating and sharing information. Informal contacts do not constitute a legal basis for the Turkish Competition Authority's actions.

Interplay between jurisdictions

14 | Which jurisdictions have significant interplay with your jurisdiction in cross-border cases? If so, how does this affect the investigation, prosecution and penalising of cartel activity in cross-border cases in your jurisdiction?

It is fair to say that the interplay between jurisdictions does not, in practice, materially affect the Board's handling of cartel investigations, including cross-border cases. Principle of comity does not take part as an explicit provision in Turkish Competition law. A cartel's conduct that was investigated elsewhere in the world can be prosecuted in Turkey if it has had an effect on non-Turkish markets.

CARTEL PROCEEDINGS

Decisions

15 | How is a cartel proceeding adjudicated or determined?

The Board can initiate an inspection about an undertaking or an association of undertakings upon complaint or ex officio. Cartel matters are primarily adjudicated by the Board. Enforcement is supplemented with private lawsuits as well. Private suits against cartel members are tried before regular courts. Owing to a treble damages clause allowing litigants to obtain three times their loss as compensation, private antitrust litigations increasingly make their presence felt in the cartel enforcement arena. Most courts wait for the decision of the Competition Authority and build their own rulings on that decision.

Burden of proof

16 | Which party has the burden of proof? What is the level of proof required?

The most important material issue specific to Turkey is the very low standard of proof adopted by the Board. The participation of an undertaking in a cartel activity requires proof that there was such a cartel activity or, in the case of multilateral discussions or cooperation, that the particular undertaking was a participant. With a broadening interpretation of the Competition Law, and especially of the 'object or effect of which . . .' branch, the Board has established an extremely low standard of proof concerning cartel activity. The standard of proof is even lower as far as concerted practices are concerned; in practice, if parallel behaviour is established, a concerted practice might readily be inferred and the undertakings concerned might be required to prove that the parallel behaviour is not the result of a concerted practice. The Competition Law brings a 'presumption of concerted practice', which enables the Board to engage in an article 4 enforcement in cases where price changes in the market, supply-demand equilibrium or fields of activity of enterprises bear a resemblance to those in the markets where competition is obstructed, disrupted or restricted. Turkish antitrust precedents recognise that 'conscious parallelism' is rebuttable evidence of forbidden behaviour and constitutes sufficient ground to impose fines on the undertakings concerned. Therefore, the burden of proof is very easily switched and it becomes incumbent upon the defendants to demonstrate that the parallelism in question is not based on concerted practice, but has economic and rational reasons behind it.

Unlike in the EU, where the undisputed acceptance is that tacit collusion does not constitute a violation of competition, the Competition Law does not give weight to the doctrine known as 'conscious parallelism and plus factors'. In practice, the Board sometimes does not go to the trouble of seeking 'plus factors' along with conscious parallelism if naked parallel behaviour is established.

Recent indications in practice also suggest that the Competition Authority officials are increasingly inclined to adopt a broadening interpretation of the definition of 'cartel'.

Circumstantial evidence

17 | Can an infringement be established by using circumstantial evidence without direct evidence of the actual agreement?

The Board considers communication evidence and economic data that indicate coordination between competitors as circumstantial evidence. Communication evidence, for instance, can prove that the possible parties to an agreement communicated with or met each other, yet cannot demonstrate the actual content of such communication. If there is no direct evidence demonstrating the existence or content of a violation, the Board might establish an infringement through circumstantial evidence by itself or along with direct evidence, especially in concerted practice cases.

Appeal process

18 | What is the appeal process?

As per Law No. 6352, which entered into force as of 5 July 2012, final decisions of the Board, including its decisions on interim measures and fines, can be submitted to judicial review before the administrative courts in Ankara by filing an appeal case within 60 days of receipt by the parties of the justified (reasoned) decision of the Board. Decisions of the Board are considered as administrative acts, and thus legal actions against them shall be pursued in accordance with the Turkish Administrative Procedural Law. The judicial review comprises of both procedural and substantive reviews.

As per article 27 of the Administrative Procedural Law, filing an administrative action does not automatically stay the execution of the decision of the Board. However, at the request of the plaintiff the court, by providing its justifications, may decide on a stay of execution if executing the decision is likely to cause serious and irreparable damages and the decision is highly likely to be against the law (that is, showing of a prima facie case).

The judicial review period before the Ankara administrative courts usually takes about 12 to 24 months. Decisions by the Ankara administrative courts are, in turn, subject to appeal before the regional courts (appellate courts) and the High State Court. If the challenged decision is annulled in full or in part, the administrative court remands it to the Board for review and reconsideration.

After the recent legislative changes, administrative litigation cases will now be subject to judicial review before the newly established regional courts (appellate courts). The new legislation has created a three-level appellate court system consisting of administrative courts, regional courts (appellate courts) and the High State Court. The regional courts will go through the case file both on procedural and substantive grounds and investigate the case file and make their decision considering the merits of the case. The regional courts' decisions will be considered as final in nature. The decision of the regional court will be subject to the High State Court's review in exceptional circumstances, which are set forth in article 46 of the Administrative Procedure Law. In this case, the

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decision of the regional court will not be considered as a final decision. In such a case, the High State Court may decide to uphold or reverse the regional courts' decision. If the decision is reversed by the High State Court, it will be remanded back to the deciding regional court, which will in turn issue a new decision which takes into account the High State Court's decision. As the regional courts have recently been established, there is not yet experience on how long does it take for a regional court to finalise its review of a file. Accordingly, the Council of State's review period (for a regional court's decision) within the new system should also be tested before providing an estimated time period. The appeal period before the High State Court usually takes about 24 to 36 months. Decisions of courts in private suits are appealable before the Supreme Court of Appeals. The appeal process in private suits is governed by the general procedural laws and usually lasts 24 to 30 months.

An appeal process is typically initiated by the infringing party in cases where the Board finds a violation, or by complainants if there is no finding of a violation. The Competition Authority does have the right to challenge a court decision by initiating a judicial review process if a decision of the Board is overturned by the deciding court.

SANCTIONS

Criminal sanctions

19 | What, if any, criminal sanctions are there for cartel activity?

The sanctions that can be imposed under the Law on Protection of Competition No. 4054 of 13 December 1994 (the Competition Law) are administrative in nature. Therefore, the Competition Law leads to administrative fines (and civil liability), but no criminal sanctions. Cartel conduct will not result in imprisonment against individuals implicated. That said, there have been cases where the matter had to be referred to a public prosecutor before or after the competition law investigation was complete. On that note, bid rigging activity may be criminally prosecutable under section 235 et seq of the Turkish Criminal Code. Illegal price manipulation (manipulation through disinformation or other fraudulent means) may also be punished by up to two years of imprisonment and a judicial fine under section 237 of the Turkish Criminal Code.

Civil and administrative sanctions

20 | What civil or administrative sanctions are there for cartel activity?

In the case of a proven cartel activity, the undertakings concerned will be separately subject to fines of up to 10 per cent of their Turkish turnover generated in the financial year preceding the date of the fining decision (if this is not calculable, the Turkish turnover generated in the financial year nearest to the date of the fining decision will be taken into account). Employees or members of the executive bodies of the undertakings or association of undertakings that had a determining effect on the creation of the violation may also be fined up to 5 per cent of the fine imposed on the undertaking or association of undertakings. After the recent amendments, the new version of the Competition Law makes reference to article 17 of the Law on Minor Offences to require the Board to take mitigating and aggravating factors into account (eg, the level of fault and amount of possible damage in the relevant market, the market power of the undertakings within the relevant market, the duration and recurrence of the infringement, the cooperation or driving role of the undertakings in the infringement, and the financial power of the undertakings or the compliance with their commitments) in determining the magnitude of the monetary fine.

In addition to the monetary sanction, the Competition Board of the Competition Authority (the Board) is authorised to take all necessary measures to terminate the restrictive agreement, to remove all de facto and legal consequences of every action that has been taken unlawfully and to take all other necessary measures in order to restore the level of competition and status as before the infringement. Furthermore, such a restrictive agreement shall be deemed legally invalid and unenforceable with all its legal consequences. Similarly, the Competition Law authorises the Board to take interim measures until the final resolution on the matter in case there is a possibility of serious and irreparable damages.

In 2020, the Board fined a number of undertakings for hindering on-site inspections. In this respect, in its *Groupe SEB İstanbul* Decision (9 January; 20–03/31–14), Groupe SEB İstanbul was fined 0.05 per cent of its turnover generated in 2018 for hindering an on-site inspection. Similarly, the Board imposed a fine of 0.5 per cent upon Unilever for not granting access to Unilever's email system for a search by using 'eDiscovery' for approximately eight hours during the on-site inspection. (*Unilever* Decision, 7 November 2019, 19–38/584–250)

In 2019, the total amount of fines imposed on undertakings that obstructed on-site inspection was 38,116,076.71 Turkish lira.

In 2017, the Board has levied administrative monetary fines within an investigation launched against 13 financial institutions, including local and international banks, active in Turkey's corporate and commercial banking markets (28 November 2017, 17–39/636–276). The main allegations concerned the exchange of competitively sensitive information on loan conditions (such as interest and maturities) regarding loan agreements and other financial transactions. After an in-depth investigation lasting 19 months, the Board unanimously concluded that BTMU (which has since been renamed MUFG Bank), ING and Royal Bank of Scotland (which became a direct subsidiary of NatWest Holdings in 2019) violated article 4 of the Competition Law. The Board imposed administrative monetary fines on ING and RBS in the amount of 21.1 million Turkish liras and 664,000 Turkish liras, respectively, based on their annual turnovers in the 2016 financial year. However, the Board resolved that it would not impose an administrative monetary fine on BTMU, pursuant to the bank's leniency application that granted it full immunity, and relieved the remaining 10 undertakings from paying administrative monetary fines.

Another decision in 2017 concerned allegations that 10 undertakings that were active in producing ready-mix concrete in Turkey's İzmir region planned to artificial increase the prices of ready-mix concrete by entering into an anticompetitive agreement or concerted practice (22 August 2017, 17–27/452–194). The Board took into account that economic evidence showed the relevant undertaking was not involved in an anticompetitive agreement or concerted practices, and it is understood that the Board took the defendants' view that it was implausible that the reached an arrangement within the alleged duration of the anticompetitive agreement, which was three months. The Board's decision constitutes a good example that the undertakings subject to an investigation based on allegations of anticompetitive agreements or concerted practice can defend themselves using economic and legal evidence, even when they are under the presumption of having engaged in a concerted practice of article 4 of the Competition Law, and so shows the importance of economic evidence.

Civil actions

Numbers of civil actions are still rare but are increasing. The majority of private lawsuits in Turkish antitrust enforcement are based on allegations of refusal to supply and price manipulation. Civil damage claims are usually settled among the involved parties prior to a court rendering judgment.

Similar to US antitrust enforcement, the most distinctive feature of Turkish competition law is that it provides for civil lawsuits for treble damages, and so supplements administrative enforcement with private lawsuits. Articles 57 et seq of the Competition Law entitle any legal or real person injured in their business or property by reason of anything

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forbidden in the antitrust laws, to sue the violators for three times their damages, plus litigation costs and attorney fees. The case must be brought before the competent general civil court. In practice, courts do not usually engage in an analysis as to whether there is a condemnable anticompetitive agreement or concerted practice, and wait for the Board to render its opinion on the matter, therefore treating the issue as a pre-judicial question. As courts usually wait for the Board's decision, the court's decision can be obtained in a shorter period as compared to regular full judiciary processes in follow-on actions.

Guidelines for sanction levels

21 Do fining or sentencing principles or guidelines exist? If yes, are they binding on the adjudicator? If no, how are penalty levels normally established? What are the main aggravating and mitigating factors that are considered?

After the recent amendments, the new version of the Competition Law makes reference to article 17 of the Law on Minor Offences to require the Board to take into consideration factors such as the level of fault and amount of possible damage in the relevant market, the market power of the undertakings within the relevant market, the duration and recurrence of the infringement, the cooperation or driving role of the undertakings in the infringement, the financial power of the undertakings, compliance with their commitments, etc, in determining the magnitude of the monetary fine. In line with this, the Regulation on Monetary Fines for Restrictive Agreements, Concerted Practices, Decisions and Abuse of Dominance (the Regulation on Fines) sets out detailed guidelines as to the calculation of monetary fines applicable in the case of an antitrust violation. The Regulation on Fines applies to both cartel activity and abuse of dominance, but illegal concentrations are not covered by the Regulation on Fines.

The Regulation on Fines states that fines are calculated by determining its base level. In the case of cartels, each undertaking's fine is set at between 2 per cent and 4 per cent of its turnover in the financial year preceding the date of the fining decision; if this is not calculable, the turnover for the financial year nearest the date of the decision is used. Then aggravating and mitigating factors are factored in. Such factors are set forth in the Regulation on Fines.

Article 5/3, states that the amount of the fine may be increased by 50 per cent if a violation lasted between one and five years, and by 100 per cent if it lasted for more than five years, and article 6, allows for the base fine to be increased by 50 per cent to 100 per cent for each repetition of the violation and also further increased by one fold if the cartel is maintained after the notification of the investigation decision.

Aggravating factors are defined under article 6 in a non-exhaustive manner and accordingly, the base fine may also be increased by:

- 50 per cent to 100 per cent, if an undertaking's commitments made regarding the elimination of competition problems raised within the scope of article 4 of the Competition Law have not been met;
- up to 50 per cent, if an undertaking does not provide assistance with an investigation; and
- up to 25 per cent in cases such as coercing other undertakings into the violation.

The provisioned increase for not providing assistance with the investigation differs from the administrative monetary fine set forth in article 16 of the Competition Law for undertakings that obstruct the investigation process by way of providing misleading information or documents or not providing any information or documents at all, or preventing or obstructing an on-site inspection. In such cases, the Board would impose a separate administrative monetary fine, for each instance of obstruction, which is separate from the final administrative monetary fine that is imposed at the end of the investigation process.

Mitigating factors are regulated under article 7 of the Regulation on Fines in a non-exhaustive manner (ie, the Board has flexibility in deciding what constitutes mitigating factors in each specific case). In this regard, the base fine may be reduced by 25 per cent to 60 per cent if:

- the concerned undertaking, or association of undertakings:
  - provided assistance to the investigation beyond the fulfilment of their legal obligations;
  - provided evidence of public authorities encouraging, or other undertakings coercing, other undertakings to take part in the violation;
  - made voluntary payments of damages to those harmed;
  - voluntarily terminated other violations; or
- the violating practices formed a very small part of the undertakings' business, in relation to its annual gross revenue.

The Regulation on Fines also applies to managers or employees who held ringleader roles within the violation (eg, those participating in cartel meetings made decisions that would involve the company in cartel activity), and also provides for certain reductions in their favour when there are mitigating factors to the violation or the undertaking has provided assistance during the course of the investigation.

The Regulation on Fines is binding on the Competition Authority.

Compliance programmes

22 Are sanctions reduced if the organisation had a compliance programme in place at the time of the infringement?

Article 7 of the Regulation on Fines follows that the Board may reduce the base fine at a rate of 25 to 60 per cent if the undertakings or association of undertakings concerned prove certain facts such as provision of assistance to the examination beyond fulfilment of legal obligations, existence of encouragement by public authorities or coercion by other undertakings in the violation, voluntary payment of damages to those harmed, termination of violations and occupation of a very small share by practices subject to the violation within annual gross revenues.

Mitigating factors are regulated under article 7 of the Regulation on Fines in a non-exhaustive manner, in such a way that the base fine may be reduced by 25 per cent to 60 per cent if:

- the concerned undertaking, or association of undertakings:
  - provided assistance to the investigation beyond the fulfilment of their legal obligations;
  - provided evidence of public authorities encouraging, or other undertakings coercing, other undertakings to take part in the violation;
  - made voluntary payments of damages to those harmed; or
  - voluntarily terminated other violations; or
- the violating practices formed a very small part of the undertakings' business, in relation to its annual gross revenue.

Regarding mitigating factors, there have been several cases where the Board considered the existence of a compliance programme as an indication of good faith (*Unilever*, 12-42/1258-410; *Efes*, 12-38/1084-343). However, recent indications suggest that the Board is disinclined to consider a compliance programme to be a mitigating factor. Although they are welcome, the mere existence of a compliance programme is not enough to counter the finding of an infringement or even to discuss lower fines (*Frito Lay*, 13-49/711-300; *Industrial Gas*, 13-49/710-297). In *Industrial Gas*, the investigated party argued that it had immediately initiated a competition law compliance programme as soon as it received the complaint letters, which were originally submitted to the authority. However, the Board did not take this into account as a mitigating factor. On the other hand, the Board's *Mey İçki* decision

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(16 February 2017, 17-07/84-34) might be signalling a change in its perception of compliance programmes. The Board applied a 25 per cent reduction on the grounds that Mey İçki (a producer and distributors of spirits) ensured compliance with competition law by taking into account the competition law sensitivities highlighted by the Board before the Board issued its final decision. Similarly, in its *Consumer Electronics* decision (7 November 2016, 16-37/628-279), the Board applied a 60 per cent reduction to an undertaking due to its compliance efforts, since the undertaking amended its contracts before the final decision of the Board.

Director disqualification

23 Are individuals involved in cartel activity subject to orders prohibiting them from serving as corporate directors or officers?

The sanctions specified in terms of undertakings themselves may apply to individuals if they engage in business activities as an undertaking. Similarly, sanctions for cartel activity may also apply to individuals acting as an infringing entity's employees or board or executive committee member if such individuals had a determining effect on the creation of the violation. Apart from these, there are no other sanctions specific for individuals. On that note, bid rigging activity may be criminally prosecutable under sections 235 et seq of the Turkish Criminal Code. Illegal price manipulation (ie, manipulation through disinformation or other fraudulent means) may also be punished by up to two years' imprisonment and a civil monetary fine under section 237 of the Turkish Criminal Code.

Debarment

24 Is debarment from government procurement procedures automatic, available as a discretionary sanction, or not available in response to cartel infringements?

Bid riggers in government procurement tenders may face blacklisting (ie, debarment from government tenders) for up to two years under article 58 of the Public Tenders Law No. 4734. The blacklisting is decided by the relevant ministry implementing the tender contract or by the relevant ministry that the contracting authority is subordinate to or is associated with. It is a duty, not an option, for administrative authorities to apply blacklisting in cases of bid rigging in government tenders. Blacklisting is only applicable to bid rigging. It is not available in cases of other forms of cartel infringement.

Parallel proceedings

25 Where possible sanctions for cartel activity include criminal and civil or administrative penalties, can they be pursued in respect of the same conduct? If not, when and how is the choice of which sanction to pursue made?

Yes. The same conduct can trigger administrative or civil sanctions (or criminal sanctions in the case of bid rigging or other criminally prosecutable conduct) at the same time.

PRIVATE RIGHTS OF ACTION

Private damage claims

26 Are private damage claims available for direct and indirect purchasers? Do purchasers that acquired the affected product from non-cartel members also have the ability to bring claims based on alleged parallel increases in the prices they paid ('umbrella purchaser claims')? What level of damages and cost awards can be recovered?

One of the most distinctive features of the Turkish competition law regime is that it provides for treble damages in lawsuits. Article 57 et seq of the Law on Protection of Competition No. 4054 of 13 December 1994 (the Competition Law) entitles any person injured in his or her business or property by reason of anything forbidden by the antitrust laws to sue the violators for three times their damages plus litigation costs and attorney fees. The Turkish obligation law regulates the joint creditors and prevents the debtor from the double recovery. All the creditors shall pursue a claim against the debtor and in that case, a debtor shall pay on the amount of their shares. However, in the event that the debtor makes a payment to only one creditor as a whole, this creditor shall be liable to the others and the other creditors.

Antitrust private lawsuits are rare but increasing in practice. The majority of private lawsuits in Turkish antitrust enforcement rely on refusal-to-supply allegations. Civil damage claims have usually been settled by the parties involved prior to the court rendering its judgment.

Indirect purchaser claims have not yet been tested before the courts. However, there is no regulation that prevents potential umbrella purchaser claims as well since the article 58 of the Competition Law which focuses on the existence of a damage by stating that:

> *Those who suffer as a result of the prevention, distortion or restriction of competition, may claim as a damage the difference between the cost they paid and the cost they would have paid if competition had not been limited.*

Class actions

27 Are class actions possible? If so, what is the process for such cases? If not, what is the scope for representative or group actions and what is the process for such cases?

Turkish procedural law does not allow for class actions or procedures. Class certification requests would not be granted by Turkish courts. While article 73 of Law No. 6502 on the Protection of Consumers allows class actions by consumer organisations, these actions are limited to violations of Law No. 6502, and do not extend to cover antitrust infringements. Similarly, article 58 of the Turkish Commercial Code enables trade associations to take class actions against unfair competition behaviour, but this has no reasonable relevance to private suits under article 57 et seq of the Competition Law.

Turkish procedural law allows group actions under article 113 of the Turkish Procedure Law No. 6100. Associations and other legal entities may initiate a group action to 'protect the interest of their members', 'to determine their members' rights' and 'to remove the illegal situation or prevent any future breach'. Group actions do not cover actions for damages. A group action can be brought before a court as one single lawsuit only. The verdict shall encompass all individuals within the group.

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COOPERATING PARTIES

Immunity

28 Is there an immunity programme? If so, what are the basic elements of the programme? What is the importance of being 'first in' to cooperate?

The Regulation on Active Cooperation for Discovery of Cartels (Regulation on Leniency) was enacted on 15 February 2009. The Regulation on Leniency sets out the main principles of immunity and leniency mechanisms. In parallel to the Regulation on Leniency, the Board published the Guidelines on Explanation of the Regulation on Active Cooperation for Discovery of Cartels on April 2013.

The leniency programme is only applicable for cartel cases. It does not apply to other forms of antitrust infringement. Section 3 of the Regulation on Leniency provides for a definition of cartel that encompasses price-fixing, customer, supplier or market sharing, restricting output or placing quotas and bid rigging.

A cartel member may apply for leniency until the investigation report is officially served on it. Depending on the timing of the application, the applicant may benefit from full immunity or fine reduction.

The first one to file an appropriately prepared application for leniency before the investigation report is officially served may benefit from full immunity. Employees or managers of the first applicant can also benefit from the full immunity granted to the applicant firm. However, there are several conditions an applicant must meet to receive full immunity from all charges. One of them is not to be the coercer of the reported cartel. If this is the case (ie, if the applicant has forced the other cartel members to participate in the cartel), the applicant firm and its employees may only receive a reduction of between 33 per cent and 100 per cent. The other conditions are as follows:

- the applicant shall submit information and evidence in respect of the alleged cartel, including the products affected, the duration of the cartel, the names of the undertakings party to the cartel, specific dates, locations and participants of cartel meetings;
- the applicant shall not conceal or destroy information or evidence related to the alleged cartel;
- the applicant shall end its involvement in the alleged cartel except when otherwise is requested by the assigned unit on the ground that detecting the cartel would be complicated;
- the applicant shall keep the application confidential until the end of the investigation, unless otherwise is requested by the assigned unit; and
- the applicant shall maintain active cooperation until the Board takes the final decision after the investigation is completed.

Subsequent cooperating parties

29 Is there a formal programme providing partial leniency for parties that cooperate after an immunity application has been made? If so, what are the basic elements of the programme? If not, to what extent can subsequent cooperating parties expect to receive favourable treatment?

The Regulation on Leniency provides for the possibility of a reduction of the fine for 'second-in' and subsequent leniency applicants. Also, the Competition Authority may consider the parties' active cooperation after the immunity application as a mitigating factor as per the provisions of Regulation on Fines.

Going in second

30 How is the second cooperating party treated? Is there an 'immunity plus' or 'amnesty plus' treatment available? If so, how does it operate?

The second firm to file an appropriately prepared application would receive a fine reduction of between 33 per cent and 50 per cent. Employees or managers of the second applicant that actively cooperate with the Competition Authority would benefit from a reduction of between 33 and 100 per cent.

The third applicant would receive a 25 per cent to 33 per cent reduction. Employees or managers of the third applicant that actively cooperate with the Competition Authority would benefit from a reduction of 25 per cent up to 100 per cent.

Subsequent applicants would receive a 16 per cent to 25 per cent reduction. Employees or managers of subsequent applicants would benefit from a reduction of 16 per cent up to 100 per cent.

Amnesty Plus is regulated under article 7 of the Regulation on Fines. According to article 7, the fines imposed on an undertaking that cannot benefit from immunity provided by the Regulation on Leniency will be decreased by 25 per cent if it provides the information and documents specified in article 6 of the Regulation on Leniency prior to the Board's decision of preliminary investigation in relation to another cartel.

Approaching the authorities

31 Are there deadlines for initiating or completing an application for immunity or partial leniency? Are markers available and what are the time limits and conditions applicable to them?

A cartel member may apply for leniency until the investigation report is officially served. Although the Regulation on Leniency does not provide detailed principles on the 'marker system', the Competition Authority can grant a grace period to applicants to submit the necessary information and evidence. For the applicant to be eligible for a grace period, it must provide minimum information concerning the affected products, duration of the cartel and names of the parties. A document (showing the date and time of the application and request for time to prepare the requested information and evidence) will be given to the applicant by the assigned unit.

Leniency applications submitted after the official service of the investigation report would not benefit from conditional immunity. Still, such applications may benefit from fine reductions.

Cooperation

32 What is the nature, level and timing of cooperation that is required or expected from an immunity applicant? Is there any difference in the requirements or expectations for subsequent cooperating parties that are seeking partial leniency?

An applicant must submit:

- information on the products affected by the cartel;
- information on the duration of the cartel;
- names of the cartelists;
- dates, locations and participants of the cartel meetings; and
- other information or documents about the cartel activity.

The required information may be submitted verbally. Markers are also available. Admission of actual price effect is not a required element of leniency application. The applicant must avoid concealing or destroying the information or documents concerning the cartel activity. Unless the Leniency Division decides otherwise, the applicant must stop taking part in the cartel. Unless the Leniency Division instructs otherwise, the application must be kept confidential until the investigation report has

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been served. The applicant must continue to actively cooperate with the Competition Authority until the final decision on the case has been rendered. The applicant must also convey any new documents to the Authority as soon as they are discovered, cooperate with the Authority on additional information requests, and avoid statements contradictory to the documents submitted as part of the leniency application.

These ground rules apply to subsequent cooperating parties as well.

Indications in practice show that the Authority was, until recently, inclined to adopt an extremely high standard regarding what constitutes 'necessary documents and information for a successful leniency application' and the 'minimum set of documents that a company is required to submit'. In *3M* (27 September 2012; 12-46/1409-461), the investigation team recommended that the Board revoke the applicant's full immunity on the grounds that the applicant did not provide all of the documents that could be discovered during a dawn raid. Unfortunately, the reasoned decision did not go into the details of the matter, since the case was closed without a finding of violation. This approach arguably sets an almost impossible standard for 'cooperation' in the context of the leniency programme that very few companies will be able to meet. The trend towards adopting an extremely broadening interpretation of the concepts of 'coercion' and 'the Authority's already being in possession of documents that prove a violation at the time of the leniency application' are all alarming signs of this new trend.

In 2015, the Board slightly eased the tensions and handed a new decision that could beckon a new era for the Turkish leniency programme. On 30 March 2015, the Board's reasoned decision of an investigation of fresh yeast producers was released (14-42/783-346). The decision was the first of its kind, where the Board granted full immunity, based on article 4/2 of the Regulation on Active Cooperation for Detecting Cartels. This immunity was granted to a submission made after the initiation of a preliminary investigation and dawn raids were executed. It served as a landmark case, in that it was the first example of the Board granting immunity after dawn raids. The Board justified this unprecedented action by claiming that substantive evidence and added value was brought in through the leniency application. In parallel, in the *Mechanical Engineering* decision (14 December 2017, 17-41/640-279), the Board accepted one undertakings' leniency application during the course of the preliminary investigation. The leniency applicant received full immunity from fines. Recently, in its decision regarding undertakings active in the Ro-Ro transportation sector (18 April 2019, 19-16/229-101), the Board decided that the administrative fine for an undertaking that applied for leniency during the investigation should be halved if the information it provides significantly contributed to the investigation. The Board further noted that relevant contributions included providing evidence that the violation's starting point was earlier than what was detected during the on-site inspection, and evidence illustrating that price information was exchanged by the violating undertakings and further details on how the price exchange was conducted. The case is therefore expected to result in an increase in number of leniency applications in Turkey in the near future.

Confidentiality

33 What confidentiality protection is afforded to the immunity applicant? Is the same level of confidentiality protection applicable to subsequent cooperating parties? What information will become public during the proceedings and when?

According to the principles set forth under the Regulation on Leniency, the applicant (an undertaking or the employees or managers of an undertaking) must keep the application confidential until the end of the investigation, unless otherwise requested by the assigned unit. The same level of confidentiality is applicable to subsequent cooperating parties as well. While the Board can also evaluate the information or documents ex officio, the general rule is that information or documents that are not requested to be treated as confidential are accepted as not confidential. Undertakings must request, in writing, confidentiality from the Board and justify the confidential nature of the information or documents that they are requesting be treated as commercial secrets. Non-confidential information may become public through the reasoned decision, which is typically announced within three to four months after the Board has decided on the case.

Settlements

34 Does the investigating or prosecuting authority have the ability to enter into a plea bargain, settlement, deferred prosecution agreement (or non-prosecution agreement) or other binding resolution with a party to resolve liability and penalty for alleged cartel activity? What, if any, judicial or other oversight applies to such settlements?

The Amendment Law introduces two new mechanisms that are inspired by the EU law and aim to enable the Board to end investigations without going through the entire pre-investigation and investigation procedures.

The first mechanism is the commitment procedure. It will allow the undertakings or association of undertakings to voluntarily offer commitments during a preliminary investigation or full-fledged investigation to eliminate the Authority's competitive concerns in terms of articles 4 and 6 of the Law on Protection of Competition No. 4054 of 13 December 1994 (the Competition Law), prohibiting restrictive agreements and abuse of dominance. Depending on the sufficiency and the timing of the commitments, the Board can now decide to not launch a full-fledged investigation following the preliminary investigation or to end an on-going investigation without completing the entire investigation procedure. However, commitments will not be accepted for violations such as price-fixing between competitors, territory or customer sharing or the restriction of supply. The Board will provide the details of these new procedures through secondary legislation. Additionally, the Board may reopen an investigation in the following cases:

- there is a substantial change in any aspect of the basis of the decision;
- the relevant undertakings' non-compliance with the commitments; and
- there is a realisation that the decision was decided on deficient, incorrect or fallacious information provided by the parties.

Second, the amendment to the Competition Law published in Official Gazette on 23 June 2020, No. 31165 (the Amendment Law) also introduced a settlement procedure. As the relevant provision is added to article 43 concerning investigations of anticompetitive conduct in general, and that the Amendment Law does not limit the settlement option to only cartels, it appears that this new procedure will also be applicable to 'other infringements' under article 4 and abuse of dominance cases under article 6.

The new law will enable the Board, ex officio or upon a party's request, to initiate a settlement procedure. Unlike the commitment procedure, a settlement can only be offered in full-fledged investigations. In this respect, parties that admit an infringement can apply for the settlement procedure until the official service of the investigation report. The Board will set a deadline for the submission of the settlement letter and if settled, the investigation will be closed with a final decision including the finding of a violation and administrative monetary fine. If the investigation ends with a settlement, the Board can reduce the administrative monetary fine by up to 25 per cent. Other procedures and principles regarding settlement will be determined by the Board's secondary legislation. That said, technically both commitments and settlement could be offered in the on-going proceedings as the Amendment Law is effective as of 24 June 2020.

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Corporate defendant and employees

35 When immunity or partial leniency is granted to a corporate defendant, how will its current and former employees be treated?

The current employees of a cartelist entity also benefit from the same level of leniency or immunity that is granted to the entity. There are no precedents about the status of former employees as yet.

Apart from this, according to the Regulation on Leniency a manager or employee of a cartelist may also apply for leniency until the investigation report is officially served. Such an application would be independent from applications by the cartel member itself, if there are any. Depending on the application order, there may be total immunity from, or reduction of, a fine for such manager or employee. The reduction rates and conditions for immunity or reduction are the same as those designated for the cartelists.

Dealing with the enforcement agency

36 What are the practical steps for an immunity applicant or subsequent cooperating party in dealing with the enforcement agency?

Since active cooperation is required from all applicant cartel members in order to maintain the leniency or immunity granted by the Board, extra effort should be spent to keep the Board informed to the maximum possible extent regarding the cartel that is subject to investigation.

DEFENDING A CASE

Disclosure

37 What information or evidence is disclosed to a defendant by the enforcement authorities?

The right of access to the file has two legal bases in the Turkish competition law regime: Law No. 4982 and Communiqué No. 2010/3 on the Regulation of Right to Access to File and Protection of Commercial Secrets (Communiqué No. 2010/3). Article 5/1 of Communiqué No. 2010/3 provides that the right of access to the case file will be granted upon the written requests of the parties within due period during the investigations. The right to access the file can be exercised on written request at any time until the end of the period for submitting the last written statement. This right can only be used once, so long as no new evidence has been obtained within the scope of the investigation. On the other hand, Law No. 4982 does not have such a restriction in terms of timing or scope. Access to the case file enables the applicant to gain access to information and documents in the case file that do not qualify as either internal documents of the Competition Authority or trade secrets of other firms or trade associations. Law No. 4982 provides for similar limitations.

Representing employees

38 May counsel represent employees under investigation in addition to the corporation that employs them? When should a present or past employee be advised to obtain independent legal advice or representation?

So long as there are no conflicts of interest, Turkish law does not prevent counsel from representing both a undertaking under investigation and its employees. That said, employees are hardly ever investigated separately, and there are no criminal sanctions against employees for antitrust infringements.

Multiple corporate defendants

39 May counsel represent multiple corporate defendants? Does it depend on whether they are affiliated?

If there are no conflicts of interest, and all the related parties consent to such representation, attorneys-at-law (members of a Turkish bar association qualified to practise law in Turkey) can and do represent multiple corporate defendants, even if they are not affiliated. Persons who are not attorneys sometimes also undertake representations, but they are not bound by the same ethics codes binding attorneys in Turkey.

Payment of penalties and legal costs

40 May a corporation pay the legal penalties imposed on its employees and their legal costs?

Yes. It is advisable to seek separate tax or bookkeeping advice before the corporation pays the legal costs or penalties imposed on its employee.

Taxes

41 Are fines or other penalties tax-deductible? Are private damages payments tax-deductible?

Pursuant to article 11 of the Corporate Tax Law No. 5520, any administrative monetary fine is not considered as tax-deductible. Depending on the specific circumstances, losses, damages and indemnities paid based upon judicial decisions may or may not be tax-deductible. This requires a case-by-case analysis and it is advisable to seek separate tax or bookkeeping advice in each case.

There is a reduction mechanism for the administrative monetary fines. The relevant legislation on payment of administrative monetary fines allows the undertakings to discharge from liability by paying 75 per cent of the fine, provided that the payment is made before any appeal. The payment of such amount is without prejudice to a later appeal. The time frame in which to pay the 75 per cent portion terminates on the 30th calendar day from the service of the full reasoned decision.

International double jeopardy

42 Do the sanctions imposed on corporations or individuals take into account any penalties imposed in other jurisdictions? In private damage claims, is overlapping liability for damages in other jurisdictions taken into account?

No. The Turkish Competition Authority would not take into account penalties imposed in other jurisdictions. The specific circumstances surrounding indirect sales are not tried under Turkish cartel rules.

Overlapping liability for damages in other jurisdictions is not taken into account.

Getting the fine down

43 What is the optimal way in which to get the fine down?

Aside from the recently introduced leniency programme, article 9 of the Law on Protection of Competition No. 4054 of 13 December 1994 (the Competition Law), which generally entitles Competition Board of the Competition Authority (the Board) to order structural or behavioural remedies to restore the competition as before the infringement, sometimes operates as a conduit through which infringement allegations are settled before a full-blown investigation is launched. This can only be established through a very diligent review of the relevant implicated businesses to identify all the problems, and adequate professional coaching in eliminating all competition law issues and risks. In cases where the infringement was too far advanced for it to be subject to only an article 9 warning, the Board at least found a mitigating factor in that

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the entity immediately took measures to cease any wrongdoing and if possible to remedy the situation.

Following amendments in 2008, the new version of Competition Law makes reference to article 17 of the Law on Minor Offences to require the Competition Board, when determining the magnitude of a monetary fine, to take into consideration factors such as:

- the level of fault and amount of possible damage in the relevant market;
- the market power of the undertakings within the relevant market;
- the duration and recurrence of the infringement;
- the cooperation or driving role of the undertakings in the infringement; and
- the financial power of the undertakings; and compliance with commitments.

There have been cases where the Board considered the existence of a compliance programme as an indication of good faith (*Unilever*, 12-42/1258-410; *Efes*, 12-38/1084-343). However, recent indications suggest that the Board is disinclined to consider a compliance programme to be a mitigating factor. Although they are welcome, the mere existence of a compliance programme is not enough to counter the finding of an infringement or even to discuss lower fines (*Frito Lay*, 13–49/711–300; *Industrial Gas*, 13–49/710–297). In the Board's *Industrial Gas* decision, the investigated party argued that it had immediately initiated a competition law compliance programme as soon as it received the complaint letters, which were originally submitted to the authority. However, the Board did not take this into account as a mitigating factor. On the other hand, the Board's *Mey İçki* decision (16 February 2017, 17-07/84-34) might be signalling a change in the Board's perception of compliance programmes. The Board decided to apply a 25 per cent reduction on the grounds that Mey İçki ensured compliance with competition law by taking into account the competition law sensitivities highlighted by the Board even before the final decision of the Board. Similarly, in *Consumer Electronics* (7 November 2016, 16–37/628–279), the Board applied a 60 per cent reduction to an undertaking because of its compliance efforts, since the undertaking amended its contracts before the final decision of the Board.

UPDATE AND TRENDS

Recent cases

44 What were the key cases, judgments and other developments of the past year?

During the course of the year in review, there has not been any significant cartel decision where the Competition Board of the Competition Authority (the Board) imposed significant administrative monetary fines. On the contrary, there is a decline in the number of cartel cases as well as the number of investigations with monetary fines. According to the annual report of the Turkish Competition Authority for 2019, the Board decided on 312 cases and 69 of them are related to competition law violations. Twenty–nine out of 69 are related to article 4 or 6 of the Competition Law. In a preliminary investigation initiated against *çiğ köfte* (a traditional version of steak tartar) producers operating in Gaziantep province of Turkey, the Board has noticed the price-fixing agreements regarding the sale price and conditions of *çiğ köfte* concluded between undertakings and acknowledged the presence of an agreement restricting competition in the relevant product market (10 January 2019, 19–03/13–5). Having said that, instead of imposing an administrative monetary fine, the Board addressed an opinion letter to the *çiğ köfte* producers pursuant to article 9/3 of the Law on Protection of Competition No. 4054 of 13 December 1994 (the Competition Law) ordering them to cease any behaviour which may generate competition law infringements.

ELİG GÜRKAYNAK Attorneys at Law

Gönenç Gürkaynak
gonenc.gurkaynak@elig.com

K Korhan Yıldırım
korhan.yildirim@elig.com

Çitlenbik Sokak No. 12
Yıldız Mahallesi Beşiktaş
34349 Istanbul
Turkey
Tel: +90 212 327 1724
Fax: +90 212 327 1725
www.elig.com

In a full-fledged investigation initiated against 16 freelance mechanical engineers on the allegation of forming a profit-sharing cartel, the Board concluded that 14 of the freelance mechanical engineers were engaged in a profit-sharing cartel and thus violated article 4 of the Competition Law. Having said that, the leniency applicant received full immunity from fines, while also relieving one of the freelance mechanical engineers from an administrative monetary fine (14 December 2017, 17–41/640–279).

Finally, the Board has levied administrative monetary fines following an investigation launched against five undertakings and one association of the undertakings active in cabotage Ro–Ro transportation lines in Turkey (18 April 2019, 19–16/229–101). The Board concluded that Tramola Gemi İşletmeciliği ve Ticaret AŞ (Tramola), Kale Nakliyat Seyahat ve Turizm AŞ (Kale Nakliyat), İstanbullines Denizcilik Yatırım AŞ (İstanbullines), İstanbul Deniz Nakliyat Gıda İnşaat Sanayi Ticaret Ltd Şti (İDN) and İstanbul Deniz Otobüsleri Sanayi ve Ticaret AŞ (İDO) violated article 4 of the Competition Law by way of collectively determining prices.

The Board imposed the following administrative monetary fines:

- 4 per cent of annual gross income on Tramola and İstanbullines;
- 0.1 per cent of annual gross income on İstanbullines, for submitting incomplete information to the Authority;
- 0.8 per cent of annual gross income on İDN and İDO; and
- 1.6 per cent of annual gross income on Kale Nakliyat, as the Board did not grant full immunity to the leniency applicant.

The total amount of the fines imposed to all of the undertakings was 7,404,850.77 Turkish liras.

Regime reviews and modifications

45 Are there any ongoing or anticipated reviews or proposed changes to the legal framework, the immunity/leniency programmes or other elements of the regime?

On 16 June 2020, the long-awaited and expected proposed amendments to the Competition Law passed through the parliament. They entered into force on 24 June 2020.According to the recital of the Amendment Proposal, these amendments add the Authority's experience of more than 20 years of enforcement to the Competition Law and bring it

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closer to European Union law. There are no further reviews or changes expected at this stage.

Coronavirus

46 What emergency legislation, relief programmes, enforcement policies and other initiatives related to competitor conduct have been implemented by the government or enforcement authorities to address the pandemic? What best practices are advisable for clients?

In order to fight the social and economic disruption of the covid-19 outbreak, on 17 April 2020, a new law entered into force, which amends the Law No. 6585 on Regulation of Retail Trade (Law No.6585). The amendment prohibits producers, suppliers and retailers from excessively increasing prices and engaging in any activity that will restrict consumers' access to products and distort competition, in particular conduct that obstructs consumers' access to products (regardless of the relevant company being dominant or not). An Unfair Price Assessment Board will be established to enforce these new prohibitions and impose administrative monetary fines in case of violations, which are also set by the new law. As the Law No.6585 concerns retailers, one can conclude that only excessive price increases and hoarding practices in relation to the retail market will be subject to Unfair Price Assessment Board's supervision. Therefore, all players in the retail market should follow the principles and procedures of the Unfair Price Assessment Board that will be announced with a secondary law.

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Quick reference tables

These tables are for quick reference only. They are not intended to provide exhaustive procedural guidelines, nor to be treated as a substitute for specific advice. The information in each table has been supplied by the authors of the chapter.

Turkey	
Is the regime criminal, civil or administrative?	The Turkish cartel regime is administrative and civil in nature, not criminal. That being said, certain antitrust violations, such as bid rigging in public tenders and illegal price manipulation, may also be criminally prosecutable, depending on the circumstances.
What is the maximum sanction?	In the case of proven cartel activity, the companies concerned shall be separately subject to fines of up to 10 per cent of their Turkish turnover generated in the financial year preceding the date of the fining decision (if this is not calculable, the turnover generated in the financial year nearest to the date of the fining decision will be taken into account).
Are there immunity or leniency programmes?	Yes
Does the regime extend to conduct outside the jurisdiction?	Turkey is one of the 'effect theory' jurisdictions, where what matters is whether the cartel activity has produced effects on Turkish markets, regardless of: • the nationality of the cartel members; • where the cartel activity took place; or • whether the members have a subsidiary in Turkey.

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