

Sixth ARAB COMPETITION FORUM (ACF)

28-29 May 2025
Baghdad, Iraq



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6th Arab Competition Forum

28–29 May 2025
Baghdad, Iraq

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Background

The 6th Arab Competition Forum was launched on Wednesday, 28 May 2025, in Baghdad, Iraq. The event was jointly organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in partnership with the Competition and Anti-Monopoly Affairs Council of the Republic of Iraq.

The forum opened with official remarks delivered in the presence of high-level representatives, including Ms. Rola Dashti, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA; Ms. Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General of UNCTAD; Mr. Benoît Cœuré, Chair of the OECD Competition Committee; and Mr. Ahmad Younes Qasim, Chair of Iraq's Competition Affairs Council. Also in attendance was Mr. Ali Al-Marzouqi, Representative of the Prime Minister of Iraq.

Held under the theme *"Enforcing Competition Laws in the Arab Region,"* the forum aimed to explore ways to strengthen the effectiveness of competition law enforcement, share experiences on legal challenges and evidence standards, address abuse of dominance, monitor mergers and acquisitions, and highlight the role of market studies in enforcement.

Spanning two days, the forum gathered representatives from competition authorities across the Arab region, along with experts, academics, and delegates from regional and international organizations. It also featured a dedicated youth session that welcomed Iraqi university students, where case studies were presented, and awards were distributed as part of the Student Competition Challenge. The forum also attracted strong sponsor engagement and influencer presence, which was visibly noted by participants and amplified through social media coverage.

This forum builds on the collaborative and learning platform launched by ESCWA and its partners in 2020 to support competition frameworks and improve the business environment in member states.

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Discussion Topics

Note: All presentations from the 6th Arab Competition Forum are available on the forum [website](#).

1) Opening Remarks

In his opening statement, **Dr. Ahmad Younes Qasim, Chair of the Competition and Anti-Monopoly Affairs Council in Iraq**, expressed his pride in hosting the forum in Baghdad. He emphasized that competition issues have become an essential economic necessity to foster growth, promote fairness, and protect consumers. He highlighted the importance of developing effective legal frameworks and strengthening cooperation among Arab countries. He called for concrete initiatives, including specialized training, data sharing, and joint coordination to tackle regional challenges—especially those related to major mergers and anti-competitive practices. He also reaffirmed Iraq's commitment to linking competition enhancement with broader economic reform efforts.

Mr. Ali Al-Marzouqi, Representative of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq, underscored the significance of holding the forum in Baghdad as a testament to Iraq's commitment to fostering a competitive economic environment in collaboration with international and regional partners. He described the forum as a vital platform for exchanging knowledge and experiences on competition policies. He also reviewed Iraq's ongoing efforts to reform its economic landscape and stressed the need for harmonizing Arab legislation to keep pace with the challenges of digital transformation. Furthermore, he called for reviewing and building on the recommendations of previous forum editions to strengthen competition law enforcement and achieve sustainable economic growth.

Dr. Rola Dashti, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, welcomed the convening of the forum in Baghdad and described it as a strategic opportunity to promote transparency and equal opportunities in Arab markets. She emphasized the importance of regional coordination in combating anti-competitive practices and highlighted ESCWA's contributions to developing analytical and legislative tools to support institutional efforts—such as the Arab Economic Legislation Portal and the Regional Competition Policy Bulletin.

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Ms. Rebeca Grynszpan, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, praised the progress made in the Arab region in the area of competition and stressed the importance of adapting to the rapidly evolving global challenges of the digital economy. She emphasized that strengthening competition policies in developing countries is a priority for UNCTAD. She also encouraged active participation in the upcoming United Nations Conference on Competition in Geneva to enhance global cooperation and share experiences.

Mr. Benoît Coeuré, Chair of the Competition Committee in OECD emphasized the critical role of effective enforcement and advocacy in strengthening competition policy across the Arab region. While acknowledging progress in merger control and enforcement activities, he noted ongoing challenges, including limited resources, legal exemptions for state-owned enterprises and key sectors, and lack of independence in some agencies. He urged Arab competition authorities to enhance their influence and credibility and highlighted the OECD's ongoing support through capacity building, legal assessments, and policy tools.

2) Special Session: Arab Youth and Competition

The Student Competition Challenge followed the opening session. It was organized in collaboration between ESCWA and the Iraqi Competition Affairs Council, with the participation of university students specializing in economics, law, and business administration. The session aimed to promote a culture of competition among youth and enhance their understanding and engagement with issues related to the enforcement of competition laws.

Students from various Iraqi universities competed by presenting case studies advocating for competition. The submitted papers were evaluated by a panel of five experts. After a brief presentation by the winners, it was announced that two winning papers would be published on the Arab Competition Forum website, along with the authors' bios. For more details on this session [check here](#).

3) Session I: Mergers and Acquisitions – Challenges and Opportunities in Enforcing Competition Laws

The first session, titled *"Mergers and Acquisitions – Challenges and Opportunities in Enforcing Competition Laws,"* opened with remarks by Ms. Ikram Abdulaziz, Advisor at the Iraqi Competition and Anti-Monopoly Affairs Council, who also served as moderator and introduced the speakers.

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Ms. Nathalie Khaled, Competition and Consumer Protection Project Coordinator at ESCWA, began by presenting global and regional trends in mergers and acquisitions, noting their growing significance in the Arab region—particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which account for the largest share of such activity. She also provided an overview of ESCWA's 2023 report evaluating the legislative and regulatory frameworks for merger control in Arab countries, highlighting disparities across nations in regulatory and enforcement indicators. Her presentation emphasized ongoing efforts to strengthen institutional independence and adopt advanced economic tools. She concluded by outlining ESCWA's support to Arab states through studies, the Arab Legislation Portal, and national capacity-building programs.

Ms. Akari Yamamoto-Boneinfant, Legal Officer Competition and Consumer Policies Branch at UNCTAD, addressed the challenges developing countries face in dealing with cross-border mergers, including the imbalance between multinational corporations and national competition authorities with limited resources, difficulty in information exchange, and divergent legal standards and procedures. Her presentation also focused on new challenges in the digital economy—such as "killer acquisitions"—and the inadequacy of traditional tools for evaluating such transactions. She concluded by stressing the potential of regional cooperation with soft law and non-binding tools as a way forward.

In his intervention, **Mr. Antonio Capobianco, Deputy-Head of the Competition Division, OECD**, focused on the complexities and challenges of managing cross-border mergers as well as on sources of divergence in competitive conditions which may complicate the notification and approval processes. He emphasised the need for deeper regional co-operation to align timelines, enhance information sharing, and establish consistent review processes. He added that enhanced co-operation not only streamlines merger reviews but also prevents companies from exploiting regulatory gaps to bypass scrutiny.

Mr. Boniface Makongo, Director of Competition at the COMESA Competition Commission, gave a detailed presentation on regional merger regulation within the COMESA common market. He emphasized the importance of collective oversight over cross-border mergers and shared best practices adopted by the commission to streamline notification and assessment procedures. He stressed the need for collaboration with national competition authorities and presented case studies that resulted in tangible regulatory interventions to safeguard competition within the common market.

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The final presentation of the session was delivered by **Mr. François Souty, CEO of LRACG Consulting**, and focused on the European Union's experience in monitoring cross-border mergers. He highlighted lessons that developing and emerging economies can draw from the EU. His presentation covered the role of merger control in preserving competitive market structures and reviewed recent trends in EU merger enforcement. He also discussed the challenges faced by regulatory authorities in smaller countries and the importance of international cooperation—especially through bilateral agreements and the use of confidentiality waiver templates. Mr. Souty concluded with an overview of key recent merger cases in Europe, stressing the need for Arab countries to develop effective frameworks for reviewing cross-border mergers.

The moderator then opened the floor for discussion, during which several participants shared their insights. This exchange of experiences and perspectives enriched the session, which concluded with a dynamic dialogue reflecting shared challenges and future visions on this topic.

4) Session II: Synergy and Cooperation – The Role of Market Studies in Enhancing Competition Law Enforcement in the Arab Region

The second session of the 6th Arab Competition Forum, held in Baghdad on 28 May 2025, was titled "*Market Studies – Their Role in Enhancing Competition Law Enforcement in the Arab Region*". The discussion was moderated by Ms. Nathalie Khaled, Coordinator of Competition, Consumer Protection, and National Development Planning Projects at ESCWA. In her opening remarks, she emphasized the central role of market studies in supporting competition authorities, calling for the adoption of modern tools and methodologies and for leveraging international best practices to improve enforcement effectiveness and promote a more equitable and competitive economic environment in the region.

Ms. Teresa Moreira, Head of the Competition and Consumer Policies Branch at UNCTAD, was the first speaker. She highlighted market studies as a strategic tool for strengthening competition law enforcement, noting that they enable authorities to monitor market dynamics and detect signs of concentration and anti-competitive practices. She stressed that market studies not only support enforcement but also guide public policy and enhance advocacy efforts with decision-makers and the private sector, especially in post-COVID-19 contexts. She shared examples from developing countries such as Kenya, India, and South Africa, demonstrating how market studies can lead to regulatory reforms and direct interventions. She concluded by underlining the importance of institutional capacity-building, data availability, and regional cooperation to ensure the effectiveness and impact of such studies.

Mr. Said Kechida, Manager for Africa and the Middle East in the Competition Division at the OECD, followed with a presentation on the versatility of market studies and the main motivations for their

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use by competition authorities. He emphasized that market studies allow authorities to gain a deeper understanding of how markets operate and can serve as a proactive tool to guide regulatory or legislative interventions. He also outlined the challenges associated with conducting market studies, such as limited resources and the need to balance comprehensiveness with timely responses. Kechida provided an overview on the regional and global trends, noting that the use of market studies is increasing among non-OECD countries, with the digital and retail sectors being the most studied in 2023. He stressed the importance of having clear legal and methodological objectives and of providing actionable recommendations to ensure that the efforts yield tangible results.

Mr. Mohamed Sheikh Rouhou, Rapporteur General of the Tunisian Competition Council, presented Tunisia's experience with sectoral market studies, emphasizing their role in understanding market structures and enhancing competition law enforcement. He explained that these studies help analyze the legal and regulatory frameworks of various sectors and identify barriers that hinder competition. He cited studies conducted in sectors such as tourism, banking, energy, and private education. These studies have led to reform recommendations and, in some cases, triggered investigations, despite challenges related to data access and the absence of mandatory mechanisms for implementing recommendations. He concluded by stressing the importance of Arab cooperation to overcome such obstacles, especially in cross-border sectors.

Ms. Kondwani Kaunda, Director of Research and Policy at the COMESA Competition Commission, highlighted the importance of market studies as a proactive tool for enhancing competition law enforcement. She explained that such studies are not only used to uncover anti-competitive practices but also to understand market structures and identify regulatory or behavioral barriers that hinder market entry and competition. She shared COMESA's experience with conducting market studies in sectors such as telecommunications and energy, while also pointing to challenges in data collection and analysis. She advocated for greater collaboration between competition authorities in the region and for sharing expertise and methodologies to improve analytical capacity and foster a common understanding of market dynamics.

The session concluded with a presentation by **Ms. Menna Mahmoud Fahmy, Competition/Economic Expert at the Egyptian Ministry of Finance**, titled *"Beyond Competition Enforcement: Market Studies as Catalysts for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development."* Her presentation explored how expanding the scope of market studies can support public policy goals, such as ensuring equitable access to essential services, addressing regional disparities, and promoting green growth. Fahmy introduced a new framework for designing market studies that incorporates social and environmental impacts. She cited case studies from Egypt and Oman—focusing on education and construction materials—demonstrating how market studies can improve competitiveness and support sustainable development.

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Following the presentations, the floor was opened for interventions and questions from Member States, fostering an engaging exchange that added valuable regional perspectives to the session's discussions.

5) Session III: The Standard and the Burden of Proof in Competition Law Cases

The third session, titled "Standards and Burdens of Proof in Competition Law Cases," was moderated by **Mr. Said Kechida, Manager for Africa and the Middle East in the Competition Division at the OECD**. He opened the session with an introductory intervention supported by illustrative slides, presenting the conceptual framework for standards and burdens of proof. His remarks highlighted fundamental principles of evidence, including the distinction between direct and indirect evidence, the role of legal presumptions, the complexity of economic analysis, the risks of error, and the importance of judicial review. He also addressed the challenges competition authorities face in proving anti-competitive practices and discussed ongoing policy debates aimed at reforming evidentiary standards to better balance effective enforcement with legal certainty.

Ms. Dina Waked, Professor at Sciences Po Law School, commenced the expert interventions addressing the rising challenges of digital markets and the need to rethink evidentiary standards. She argued that the shift to digital platforms creates significant complications, particularly in algorithmic collusion and zero-price markets, where traditional price-based analysis is no longer sufficient. Dina stressed that competition authorities must urgently develop tools to work with non-price data, such as service quality, consumer choice, or data exploitation, and that we must first ask what our goals are—whether to encourage startups, prevent monopolistic dominance, or ensure fair access—then adapt our laws accordingly. She also advocated for bolstering leniency programs, which can be crucial in uncovering hard-to-detect digital collusion. Her conclusion called for a fundamental re-evaluation of the objectives and tools of competition law in light of evolving economic realities, urging authorities to proactively define what constitutes desirable market outcomes.

Ms. Hend Hassanien, Manager Legal Service and Compliance, COMESA Competition Commission shared the experience of the regional body, which covers 21 countries in South and East Africa, including six Arab states. She described how COMESA assesses mergers and concentrations by collecting data from merging parties to understand market structure, major players, and consumer impact. She explained that while the initial burden of proof lies with the commission based on

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submitted data, it can shift to the parties if they claim efficiencies or market benefits from the merger. In such cases, the parties must provide clear and verifiable evidence. Hind stressed that the standard and framework of proof must be clearly codified in the legal system, and that in light of developments in digital markets, COMESA is already revising its laws to incorporate the necessary flexibility. She emphasized the importance of guidance tools to ensure procedural clarity and legal certainty for both the authority and the concerned parties.

Mr. Hassan Hassen Guizani, President, Tunisia Competition Council, started his speech with an in-depth reflection on the burden of proof in competition law, emphasizing Tunisia's experience. He highlighted the difficulty of proving anti-competitive behaviour in the absence of direct evidence, particularly when there are no formal agreements but economic effects suggest collusion or abuse. He discussed the role of economic analysis in supporting investigations but warned that results are often inconclusive, making enforcement difficult. Hassan called for clear legislative texts to support judicial reasoning and avoid procedural violations, noting that while judges may strive to uncover the truth, the absence of legal clarity and delays due to lengthy economic assessments can hinder effective enforcement. He also referenced the example of Prophet Yusuf's shirt from the Qur'an to illustrate how misleading evidence can be. His final message emphasized the need for better legal structures and tools to support competition enforcement, especially in a rapidly evolving economic landscape.

Ms. Alaa Alsubhi, Legal Specialist, General Authority for Competition in Saudi Arabia, explained how the General Authority for Competition uses economic and indirect evidence to assess competition violations, particularly in criminally treated cases such as cartels. She elaborated on the distinction between direct and circumstantial evidence and how Saudi Arabia's legal system, with its high standard of proof, requires the removal of doubt from the accused. Alaa outlined how economic modelling and behavioural analysis are used to infer collusion or abuse but acknowledged the challenges in applying such evidence under strict evidentiary standards. She emphasized ongoing efforts within the authority to prepare detailed guidelines and capacity-building tools to assist committees and non-economists in interpreting technical evidence. In her concluding remarks, she emphasized the need for improved methodologies to process complex economic data in line with judicial expectations.

Mr. Amine Mansour, Case Handler at DG COMP, European Commission, provided a comprehensive overview of the EU's approach to the burden and standard of proof, contrasting merger control with antitrust enforcement. He explained that in merger control, the Commission bears the burden to prove a significant impediment to competition, applying the "balance of probabilities" standard—confirmed in key rulings like *CK Telecom* and *ThyssenKrupp*. In contrast, antitrust cases, such as those involving cartels or abuse of dominance, require a higher "firm conviction" standard. He described the evidentiary process as interactive, with all forms of evidence—economic models, internal documents, consumer feedback—considered valid, while cautioning against "evidentiary inflation" that may

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hinder enforcement. He concluded by noting ongoing EU reforms to introduce structural presumptions and safe harbors aimed at rebalancing the burden of proof without weakening enforcement.

Following the expert deliberations, Member States and participants raised several key issues during the open discussion. The UAE highlighted the limitations of rigid legal thresholds for market dominance—such as fixed market share percentages—arguing that such criteria can impede enforcement when firms with lower shares still wield substantial influence, especially in digital markets. Iraq emphasized the difficulty of proving cartel behavior due to the judicial system’s reliance on direct evidence, noting that circumstantial indicators like price alignment are often insufficient. There was a strong call for enhanced legal tools, including economic and digital forensics, to support investigations and avoid reversals on appeal. The moderator concluded by emphasising that there are no easy solutions for competition authorities to meet the standard of proof but undertaking the hard work of meticulously collecting relevant evidence, addressing potential inconsistencies, providing solid reasons for any conclusions drawn and staying up to date with market developments.

6) Session IV: Strengthen Competition Law Enforcement against Abuse of Dominance – Developing Legal Frameworks and Investigation Tools

In Session 4 of the forum, titled “*Strengthening Competition Law Enforcement Against Abuse of Dominance – Developing Legal Frameworks and Investigation Tools*,” speakers from different jurisdictions shared insights into how their competition authorities address abuse of dominance, especially in the context of digital markets. **Ms. Akari Yamamoto-Bonenfant, Legal Officer, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch at UNCTAD**, moderated the session, emphasizing its focus on investigation and enforcement against abuse of dominance, particularly by digital platforms. She highlighted the tools and methodologies used by competition authorities to investigate, assess market power, and analyse anti-competitive effects. She also noted a global shift toward more flexible legal frameworks to address digital challenges and introduced the concept of “abuse of superior bargaining position,” used in jurisdictions like Japan to target unfair trade practices without requiring proof of dominance.

Mr. Hassan Abu Abdelmajid, Vice President of the Moroccan Competition Council, delivered the first presentation of the session, showcasing Morocco’s experience in addressing abuse of dominance cases, with a focus on the legal and procedural developments within the national competition

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framework. He noted that the Competition Council places strong emphasis on improving investigative tools and enhancing the ability to detect and intervene in such cases, particularly in sectors with high market concentration. He also presented recent cases handled by the Council, illustrating how economic and legal analysis was used to assess market dominance.

Ms. Passant Youssef, Head of the Bid-Rigging Team at the Egyptian Competition Authority, delivered a detailed presentation on practices considered abuse of dominance under Egyptian law and the enforcement tools available to address them. She reviewed the types of abuse outlined in Article 8 of the Egyptian Competition Law, including imposing unfair conditions, tying products, discriminatory treatment, and enforcing resale price maintenance. She explained the criteria for assessing market dominance as defined by law, emphasizing that a combination of conditions must be met to confirm dominance. The presentation also covered key enforcement tools used by the authority, such as interim measures, referrals to the public prosecutor, or administrative settlements. Youssef presented recent real-life enforcement cases, showing how these measures have helped curb anti-competitive behavior and strengthen deterrence.

Ms. Se-Young Oh, Legal Researcher at the Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC), presented the Korean legal framework for addressing abuse of dominance under the Monopoly Regulation and Fair Trade Act (MRFTA). She explained that dominance is presumed when a firm holds over 50% of the market or when the top three firms together hold more than 75%, with additional factors such as entry barriers also considered. Ms. Oh outlined the enforcement process and highlighted two key digital cases: the first involving a \$19.5 million fine against a price comparison platform for manipulating algorithms to favor its own listings; and the second, a \$750,000 fine related to exclusive practices in an online real estate service that excluded competitors. She also noted the use of Korea's "abuse of superior bargaining position" provision to address unfair conduct even in the absence of market dominance.

Following the expert presentations, participants raised several key points. Jordan highlighted recent legal reforms and proposed legislation to establish a more independent competition authority and introduce a leniency program. Palestine asked Egypt for clarification on the 25% dominance threshold and the proposed fines committee, to which Egypt explained that market definition depends on case specifics, and the committee is still under study. An expert noted that similar enforcement models exist in countries like Saudi Arabia, helping speed up decisions while allowing for judicial review. Morocco emphasized using flexible framework laws for dynamic sectors like AI, while Egypt, Korea, and others stressed the need for adaptable tools, clear theories of harm, and continued regional cooperation. The moderator closed the session by thanking participants and reaffirming the value of innovative, flexible approaches to enforcement.

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Forum Conclusion

1. Closing Session

The concluding session of the 6th Arab Competition Forum, held in Baghdad on 29 May 2025, was led by **Ms. Nathalie Khaled, Coordinator of the Competition and Consumer Protection Project at ESCWA**. She opened the session by thanking all speakers, participants, and national authorities, particularly the Iraqi hosts, for their active contributions and commitment throughout the forum. She explained that the objective of the concluding session was to reflect on the collective outcomes of the event and present the most important findings from the comprehensive survey circulated among Arab competition authorities in preparation for the forum.

The survey results provided a data-driven foundation for shaping a forward-looking roadmap that aligns regional priorities with available international support. The purpose was to identify areas of convergence, detect structural gaps, and define actionable next steps to advance competition policy implementation across the Arab region in a coherent and collaborative manner.

Key Priority Areas Identified

Participants identified several key priorities for advancing competition policy in the Arab region. Addressing challenges in digital markets emerged as a top concern, with strong calls for enhanced regional cooperation to tackle platform-related issues. Equally important was the need to strengthen institutional frameworks by updating competition laws to reflect modern market dynamics and ensuring the legal and operational independence of competition authorities. Participants also emphasized the importance of capacity-building and technical assistance, particularly in enforcement and digital economy tools. Improving data collection and market studies, promoting fair competition in public procurement, and developing real-time monitoring systems were also highlighted. Finally, there was consensus on the need to better integrate competition policy with broader economic and trade agendas to support inclusive growth and innovation.

Capacity-Building and Technical Needs

The most urgent technical topic identified by competition authorities is the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning tools into competition policy, reflecting growing interest in modernizing digital methodologies for market analysis. This is followed by the need to assess the impact of mergers and acquisitions, and the development of advanced digital monitoring tools. On

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the capacity-building front, technical training on enforcement tools tops the list, followed by specialized training for judges and prosecutors, and awareness programs targeting policymakers and stakeholders. These findings reveal a strong intersection between technical priorities and capacity-building needs, underscoring the importance of developing both skills and tools to ensure the effectiveness of future competition policies.

Most Valued Tools and Platforms

The tools developed by ESCWA were widely recognized, with the most utilized and appreciated being the market monitoring tools to detect anti-competitive behavior, the legislative framework tool for the business environment in Arab countries, the market assessment tools, and the Arab Legislation Portal.

Sectors Prioritized for Competition Assessments

Participants identified key sectors for immediate analytical focus due to high entry barriers, structural concentration, and strategic economic importance. These sectors included telecommunications, transport and logistics, pharmaceuticals, construction and building materials, and financial services.

Main Recommendations and Agreed Actions

Drawing on the survey findings and two days of substantive discussions, participants adopted a set of recommendations to guide regional collaboration and national reform in the next phase. A range of proposals was put forward to strengthen competition frameworks across the Arab region, with three core priorities emerging. First, participants recommended modernizing legal and regulatory frameworks for the digital economy, including measures to address digital-specific abuses such as self-preferencing and algorithmic manipulation, introduce oversight over dominant platforms, and leverage AI and big data in enforcement. Second, enhancing institutional capacity was suggested through structural adjustments to support the autonomy of competition authorities, improve staffing and technical expertise, streamline procedures, and establish practical workshops on related matters. Third, participants encouraged deeper regional cooperation and knowledge sharing through coordinated investigations, joint sectoral studies, expanded publications, and functional coordination between existing regional networks to reduce duplication while preserving institutional diversity.

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2. Final Remarks and Forward Vision

The closing session concluded with final remarks from participants, who highlighted persistent challenges to effective competition enforcement in the Arab region, including political interference, limited institutional capacity, weak judicial expertise, and restricted access to critical data. Participants called for comprehensive legal reforms, the establishment of independent and well-funded competition authorities, and stronger regional cooperation—particularly through shared tools, cross-border case coordination, and youth engagement in policy research. Concerns were also raised regarding the proposed merger of the ACF with the Arab Competition Network (ACN), with calls to clearly define their respective mandates before considering integration. The session concluded with the announcement that the United Arab Emirates will host the 7th Arab Competition Forum, followed by expressions of appreciation to the hosts and organizers of the 6th Forum, and a group photo to commemorate the occasion.

Annex

Agenda

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Day 1	Wednesday, 28 May 2025
8.30–9 a.m.	Registration and National Anthem
9–9.45 a.m. Opening Session (Live Broadcast)	Opening remarks: • Ahmad Youness Kassem, President of the competition and Antitrust Council, Republic of Iraq • Ali Al-Marzouqi, Representative of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq • Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA • Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) • Benoît Coeuré, Chair of the Competition Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
9.45–10.45 a.m. Special Session	Arab Youth in Competition (Iraqi Universities) • Participating universities in Iraq have been invited to develop case studies on competition law enforcement topics, including mergers and acquisitions, market studies, sectoral investigations, and abuse of dominance cases. • This special celebratory session will feature an award ceremony honoring the winners of the Competition Challenge.
10.45–11.00 a.m.	Coffee break and group photo
11.00 a.m.–1.00 p.m. Session 1	Session I: Mergers & Acquisitions: Challenges and Opportunities in Competition Law Enforcement • This session will explore the role of competition authorities in regulating and monitoring mergers and acquisitions (M&A),

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Day 1

Wednesday, 28 May 2025

particularly cross-border transactions, and their impact on regional market structures.

- Discussions will highlight key challenges faced by regulatory bodies.
- The session will also examine opportunities to enhance regional cooperation in enforcing competition laws to prevent market concentration, promote transparency, and ensure a fair and sustainable competitive environment.
- The best international practices and successful regional experiences in handling M&A cases will be shared, with a focus on developing more integrated and flexible regulatory frameworks to keep pace with modern market challenges.

Session Coordinator: Competition and Antitrust Council of Iraq

Moderator: Ekram Abdul Aziz, Advisor at the Competition and Antitrust Council of Iraq

Speakers: (Tentative)

- Nathalie Khaled, Coordinator of the competition, consumer protection and national planning for development projects, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCWA
- Akari Yamamoto-Bonenfant, Legal Officer, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, UNCTAD
- Antonio Capobianco, Deputy-Head of the Competition Division, OECD
- Boniface Makongo, Competition Director, COMESA Competition Commission
- Francois Souty, Executive President, Cabinet LRACG Conseil

Developments in Member States

Open Discussion

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Day 1	Wednesday, 28 May 2025
1.00–2.00 p.m.	Lunch break

Day 1	Wednesday, 28 May 2025
2.00–4.00 p.m. Session 2	Session II: Market Studies – Their Role in Strengthening Competition Law Enforcement in the Arab Region - This session will focus on the role of market studies in strengthening competition law enforcement in Arab countries, particularly how they are used to analyze market dynamics and identify anti-competitive practices. - Discussions will cover modern tools and methodologies that help competition authorities in assessing market structures, detecting signs of economic concentration, and improving enforcement efforts. - Best practices from other countries will be examined to enhance market studies, with an emphasis on how innovation and technology can improve the accuracy of analysis and strengthen regulatory interventions, ensuring a more competitive and equitable economic environment. Session Coordinator: ESCWA Moderator: Nathalie Khaled, Coordinator of the competition, consumer protection and national planning for development projects, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCWA Speakers: - Teresa Moreira, Head, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, Division on International Trade and Commodities, UNCTAD

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Day 1	Wednesday, 28 May 2025
	- Saïd Kechida, Manager for Africa and the Middle East, Competition Division, OECD - Mohamad Cheikhrouho, General Rapporteur, Tunisian Competition Council - Kondwani Kaonga, Manager of Research and Policy, COMESA Competition Commission - Menna Mahmoud Fahmy, Competition Consultant/Economist at the Ministry of Finance, Egypt Developments in Member States Open Discussion

Day 2	Thursday, 29 May 2025
8.30–9 a.m.	Registration

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Day 2	Thursday, 29 May 2025
9–11 a.m. Session 3	Session III: The Standard and the Burden of Proof in Competition Law Cases - This session will discuss the crucial importance of the rules regarding the standards and burden of proof, as well as the relationship between them. - Topics will include the challenges faced by competition authorities in meeting the standard of proof in their jurisdictions, and whether the standard of proof and the related evidentiary requirements have become more stringent for competition authorities in proving anti-competitive conduct or blocking mergers. - The session will also address the ongoing debate on whether the standard of proof should be modified or the burden of proof adjusted to overcome the challenges faced by competition authorities, and how to achieve the right balance between enforcement, legal certainty, and effective judicial review. Session Coordinator: OECD Moderator: Saïd Kechida, Manager for Africa and the Middle East, Competition Division, OECD Speakers: - Hassen Guizani, President, Competition Council, Tunisia - Hend Hassanien, Manager Legal Service and Compliance, COMESA Competition Commission - Alaa Alsubhi, Legal Specialist, General Authority for Competition, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - Amine Mansour, Case Handler, DG COMP, European Commission - Dina Waked, Professor, Sciences Po Law School Open Discussion
11–11.30 a.m.	Coffee break

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Day 2	Thursday, 29 May 2025
11.30 a.m.–1.30 p.m. Session 4	Session IV: Strengthen Competition Law Enforcement against Abuse of Dominance – Developing Legal Frameworks and Investigation Tools - This session will focus on enhancing the effectiveness of investigations into abuse of dominance cases by developing an integrated legal framework and adopting modern mechanisms to better capture market dominance and its abuse. - Discussions will highlight advanced technologies, as well as economic and legal methodologies used to assess market power and anti-competitive effects, improving investigation speed and precision and ensuring timely intervention. - The session will also review best practices from around the world to strengthen enforcement actions against abuse of dominance. Session Coordinator: UNCTAD Moderator: Akari Yamamoto-Bonenfant, Legal Officer, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, UNCTAD Speakers: - Hassan Abu Abd El Majid, Vice President, Competition Council of Morocco - Passant Youssef, Head, Bid-rigging Team, Egyptian Competition Authority - Francis Kariuki, Senior Consultant in Competition and Trade Policy, Bowmans Law Firm - Seyoung Oh, Deputy Director, Antitrust Investigation Division, Korea Fair Trade Commission Developments in Member States Open Discussion
1.30–2.30 p.m.	Lunch break
2.30–3 p.m. Closing Session	The Way Forward for Strengthening Competition in the Arab Region

Sixth ARAB COMPETITION FORUM (ACF)

28-29 May 2025
Baghdad, Iraq



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Day 2

Thursday, 29 May 2025

Session Coordinators: ESCWA and Partners

- In this session, participants will present lessons learned and discuss key areas for intervention necessary to advance competition in the Arab region.
- The session aims to reach consensus on concrete recommendations to enhance the enforcement of competition policies in member states.