The Autorité creates a digital economy unit

Published on January 09, 2020

Background

This specialised unit, which will report directly to the General Rapporteur, will be tasked with developing in-depth expertise in all digital areas and cooperating in the investigation of anticompetitive practices in the digital economy.

As of January 2020, the unit will include a wide range of profiles, such as engineers, lawyers, economists and data science specialists. This unit will comprise, during the launch phase, 4 positions, including a head of unit.

The *Autorité* will soon start the recruitment campaign for the posts to be filled.



The digital revolution raises new questions

The accelerated digitisation of the economy is engendering profound changes: the emergence of platforms, sometimes of global scale, that benefit from network effects and have access to significant financial resources, and the disruption of physical retail through online sales, new products and services based on technological innovation, algorithms, artificial intelligence or blockchain technology.

All these phenomena are radically changing the competition rules in all markets. They are creating new challenges for the *Autorité de la concurrence*:

- How can we apprehend the challenges of competition when faced with stakeholders developing new business models based, for example, on the collection and processing of personal data or the creation of global user communities?
- How can we detect new types of breaches committed through algorithms, which are more easily concealed than conventional cartels?
- How can we use new tools based on big data or artificial intelligence to effectively crack down on anticompetitive effects on competition?

Investing in knowledge, developing discussions and taking action

"*Our conviction*, explains Isabelle de Silva, President of the *Autorité de la concurrence*, *is that, in order to properly measure these changes and adapt how we implement competition regulation tools, we must invest in knowledge and develop cross-disciplinary discussion. A deeper understanding of these phenomena and technologies is needed in order to be one step ahead and anticipate the new issues that may arise tomorrow in different markets. We need to understand the new sectors built on digital technology, as we have done with online advertising or the audiovisual sector, for example, with the revolution in over-the-top (OTT) media services such as Netflix. Finally, an active policy for detecting anticompetitive practices in the digital economy must be implemented. These are the conditions for maintaining - or regaining – a competitive dynamic in these markets and that the ability of new competitors to innovate and enter the market is always guaranteed*."

To support these efforts, the *Autorité* has decided to create a dedicated digital unit, which will strengthen its resources in digital areas.

The responsibilities of the Digital Economy Unit

This unit will take part in the *Autorité*'s discussions and sector-specific inquiries on new issues related to the development of digital technology, in line with those already carried out on big data, online advertising and algorithms. It will thus be able to contribute to on-going studies on payments, blockchain platforms and technologies, as well as on changes to physical retail brought about by digital technology ('phygital' study).

The team will also be responsible for developing new digital investigation tools, based in particular on algorithmic technology, big data and artificial intelligence.

The new service will also provide support to the *Autorité*'s investigation and inspection units that are handling cases with a significant digital dimension. It will thus contribute to the analysis of the most complex cases regarding company mergers involving actors from the digital sector and litigation procedures that concern compliance with competition law in a digital environment: for example breaches committed by digital means, regarding problems with referencing, ranking bias or collusion through the use of algorithms.

Finally, the digital economy unit will work in close cooperation with industry regulators, relevant government departments and other competition authorities at European and international level to develop convergent and standardised methods of analysis and intervention. It will also be responsible for developing discussions with the academic community and research institutions specialising in digital subjects.

Contact(s)

Bertille Gauthier
Communications Officer
+33155040039
Contact us by e-mail