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Note from the Chair for the Steering Group Meeting on 23 September 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The 2020 ICN Annual Conference week concluded today. I have thanked our host agencies, the working group co-chairs and everyone involved in my opening and closing, and I wish to thank them again here. This was really a hard piece of work, a new format had to be developed under time pressure after having organized the initially planned L.A. conference already for quite some time. But the result is worth all these efforts. Over 2500 participants dialled in on Day 1. Well done!

I also want to thank Csaba Balázs Rigó, József Sárai and the whole team at the Hungarian Competition Authority for their commitment to host ICN 2021. I think it was wise to postpone the date to October and we all hope that we will be able to meet in Budapest in person.

At the Steering Group Meeting on 23 September we will look back at the conference and discuss what worked well in this new setting and where SG members see room for improvement. Transforming the L.A. conference into a virtual event was the most visible step that we can work together under these special circumstances of the pandemic and adapt our tools.

Although ICN is a virtual network, the in-person meetings at the Annual Conference and workshops or at the margins of OECD or other events are such a crucial part of our way to interact and co-operate that working in a purely virtual setting will require adjustments.

There are a few things I realized during the conference week. First, moving to virtual – at least for a while – can offer new opportunities. But instead of trying to replicate, we need to think fresh. Second, virtual events are less time-consuming for those who would have travelled otherwise, but not much less work for those who prepare the events. So it is not the time to cut resources in the international teams. The success of ICN continues to be based on the commitment of its members, and a successful ICN which can support its members is particularly

important in times of crisis. Third, looking at my own agency, the pandemic leads to a re-weighting of the importance of topics which will also affect the working groups' priorities.

What does this mean for the new ICN year? At least for this year we will have a new rhythm, from September to October. Whether and when we can go back to our usual timing remains to be seen.

How to keep the visibility of ICN with the interested public and competition community and offer formats relevant for agencies and agency leadership? I have already mentioned town hall meetings and the option of agency head virtual discussions.

The working groups have started to revisit the work plans, taking into account COVID-19 related topics like crisis cartels and horizontal cooperation, unilateral conduct in times of crisis and advocacy. The Merger Working Group is organizing a webinar series covering issues such as failing firm mergers. Agency Effectiveness is looking at agency responses to the pandemic and will present the updated COVID-19 reference tool. How to conduct investigations and dawn raids might be something we should look at. In view of these new tasks we will then have to consider which project can be postponed.

Another issue is how to deal with workshops? Should working groups develop virtual formats? Or could we work together to set up a single core series of events this year, based on the same technical infrastructure, connected but at the same time leaving room for the working groups' ideas?

And last but not least: How can we ensure close coordination internally and among each other while many of us will remain in home office for a longer period of time? How to keep the spirits up for the working level, who cannot travel, don't meet their counterparts, don't participate in breakout sessions, but are so important for the ICN?

These are just a couple of thoughts to fuel our discussion. I am very interested in your views.

We have already discussed the Third Decade Project, 3D, which is very timely and will be started soon. You have received a draft questionnaire which we will discuss.

I look forward to speaking with you next Wednesday.

With best regards,

Andreas Mundt