



CPI Antitrust Chronicle

August 2012 (2)

Competition Outreach and Advocacy When All the World Is Your Stage: The ICN Experience

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I. INTRODUCTION

For the International Competition Network (“ICN”), a virtual organization with 123 of the world’s competition agencies as members and many more non-governmental advisors (“NGAs”), one of the biggest challenges the network faces is outreach. Part II of this article describes ICN’s principal outreach tools and techniques, and provides an opportunity for readers to share ideas about other methods the network should pursue.

Competition advocacy was one of the first areas of competition law and policy the ICN addressed when it was formed in 2001. Since then, most of the ICN’s work on advocacy has been aimed at providing tools and learning so that its members can engage in effective domestic advocacy, as surveyed in part III of this article. More recently, however, the ICN’s competition advocacy work is reaching out to a new audience, as described in the final section.

II. OUTREACH

As a young, virtual organization with members and NGAs from more than 100 countries, the ICN has a more diverse audience to reach than many of its competition counterparts. The ICN’s outreach tools reflect this diverse audience, aimed at competition law novices and experts, new and more seasoned members, NGAs, and the wider competition community.

For novices and experts alike who are new to the ICN, the ICN has [outreach toolkits for members](#) and [NGAs](#), designed to provide an introduction to the ICN and its current projects, as well as a [catalogue](#) of all ICN work product. For agencies wanting more in-depth assistance understanding or applying ICN work product, the [Advocacy and Implementation Network Support Program](#) provides one-on-one assistance. The [ICN blog](#) keeps readers abreast of ICN-related events as well as notable developments in member jurisdictions.

An ambitious outreach project the ICN launched two years ago is the creation of a free-of-charge online interactive educational center. In this [Curriculum Project](#), a diverse and distinguished group of agency officials, academics, and practitioners offer competition law and economics training modules, consisting of video lectures and accompanying materials. As part of a similar drive to offer training and promote experience sharing, the ICN holds teleseminars and webinars on a broad range of topics such as [advocacy](#) and [unilateral conduct](#).

These are only a few of ICN’s current outreach activities. New initiatives are underway. For example, earlier this summer, Eduardo Pérez Motta, President of the Mexican Comisión Federal de Competencia and the new Chair of the ICN Steering Group, held the ICN’s first

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“town hall meeting” to stimulate a robust discussion with members and NGAs about the ICN’s future work.

Readers with suggestions for how the ICN should engage in outreach should send them [here](#).

III. ADVOCACY

The ICN’s very first work product was a [report on advocacy](#) that included what has become the benchmark definition of competition advocacy: “Competition advocacy refers to those activities conducted by the competition authority related to the promotion of a competitive environment for economic activities by means of non-enforcement mechanisms, mainly through its relationships with other governmental entities and by increasing public awareness of the benefits of competition.”

Early work also focused on a compilation of model advocacy provisions in member competition laws, [member case studies](#), and an online information center. This latter project recently was revised and updated to create an “[advocacy toolkit](#)”, which provides a description of tools to share and disseminate alternative approaches to advocacy, as well as a practical guide for competition agencies looking to revise their current advocacy programs.

The Advocacy Working Group’s [current work](#) includes a project on competition culture, which seeks to define competition culture and summarize experiences on how agencies interact with constituent parts of a competition culture. A second project, on raising awareness of the benefits of competition, seeks to provide ICN members with knowledge, strategies, and arguments for explaining the benefits of competition to support their competition advocacy efforts with various stakeholders. The group will also hold a [workshop](#) in October 2012 on topics such as advocacy and institutional reform, advocacy and economics, and competition impact assessment of legislation.

IV. A NEW AUDIENCE

To date, the target of the ICN’s work on advocacy has been competition agencies themselves—supplying agency officials with tools to help them engage in effective advocacy. This focus may soon shift to include new faces. In April 2012, Eduardo Pérez Motta issued a [vision statement](#) outlining priorities for his tenure. He sees the ICN as poised to play a more visible role in global policy debates going forward, as a vehicle to put competition on the global policy agenda.

As part of the initiative to increase visibility of competition policy, Mr. Pérez Motta has also proposed working with domestic regulators—proposing a project to dismantle anticompetitive government restraints by equipping domestic regulators to consider competition issues in creating law and policy. Building on existing work the ICN has done on specific sectors, as well as the OECD’s [Competition Assessment Toolkit](#), the ICN would develop principles and practices for regulators, and then invite regulators to engage in a dialogue to refine and implement them.

Another shift identified in Mr. Pérez Motta’s priorities is a growing advocacy role for the ICN with its own members. This represents a significant step forward from the ICN’s historically cautious approach in its early years, but builds on recent steps in this direction over the past few

years. Mr. Pérez Motta envisions that, at member request, the ICN will advocate its best practices and other work product in support of domestic reforms.

These new approaches to competition advocacy promise great challenges but also great rewards. To learn more about these initiatives and their implementation, visit CPI's new [ICN column](#), part of CPI's regular monthly newsletter.