

Merger Control

The international regulation of mergers and joint ventures in 64 jurisdictions worldwide

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Legislation and jurisdiction

1 What is the relevant legislation and who enforces it?

Swedish merger control is regulated by the Swedish Competition Act (the Act), which entered into force on 1 November 2008. The changes that the new Competition Act introduced, relating to the merger rules, were on the whole intended to bring the assessment undertaken under the Act even further in line with that undertaken under the EC Merger Regulation. Also, the turnover thresholds for mandatory notification of a concentration have been changed.

The Competition Authority has primary responsibility for the administration of the Act, while orders concerning prohibitions and other sanctions may be made only by the Stockholm District Court or on appeal by the Market Court.

2 What kinds of mergers are caught?

The Act's merger control rules are based on the concept of 'concentration', which is intended to correspond completely to the concept of a concentration under the EC Merger Regulations. This concept is defined in a general way so as to allow a dynamic interpretation in line with EC law, including existing as well as future case law of the EC Court of Justice. More precisely, the Act prescribes that a concentration within the meaning of the Act arises in the following situations:

- two or more previously independent undertakings merge; or
- one or more persons (already controlling at least one undertaking) or one or more undertakings acquire, whether by purchase of securities or assets, by contract or by any other means, direct or indirect control over the whole or parts of one or more undertakings.

The creation of a joint venture performing, on a lasting basis, all the functions of an autonomous economic entity, namely a full-function joint venture, constitutes a concentration within the meaning of the Act.

The Competition Authority refers to the European Commission's Consolidated Jurisdictional Notice and its guidance on the concept of concentration under the EC Merger Regulation.

3 Are joint ventures caught?

The Act is applicable to all full-function joint ventures, that is, all joint ventures constituting a concentration within the meaning of the Act. To the extent the creation of a full-function joint venture has as its object or effect the coordination of the competitive behaviour of undertakings that remain independent, such coordination shall be appraised in accordance with the criteria of the provisions on anti-competitive cooperation between undertakings.

Under the Act, a concentration should be blocked where such coordination cannot be accepted under the rules on anti-competitive

cooperation between undertakings.

The Competition Authority refers to the European Commission's Consolidated Jurisdictional Notice and its guidance on the concept of full-function joint ventures.

4 Is there a definition of 'control' and are minority and other interests less than control caught?

The Act's definition of a concentration follows the relevant rules of the EC Merger Regulation. In short, acquisitions of minority interests are only caught by the merger rules if they include a de facto acquisition of control.

5 What are the jurisdictional thresholds?

The Act's merger control rules provide for mandatory notification where the undertakings concerned by the concentration attain a combined turnover in Sweden of more than 1 billion krona, and each of at least two of the undertakings concerned has a turnover in Sweden exceeding 200 million krona. When calculating the turnover of the undertakings concerned, two or more transactions that have taken place within a two-year period between the same persons or undertakings are treated as one and the same concentration.

The Competition Authority refers to the European Commission's Consolidated Jurisdictional Notice and its guidance on calculation of turnover and on the concept of undertakings concerned.

6 Is the filing mandatory or voluntary? If mandatory, do any exceptions exist?

Provided the merger falls within the scope of the Act and the turnover thresholds are met, filing is mandatory. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Even if the second threshold (ie, at least two of the undertakings concerned have a turnover in Sweden exceeding 200 million krona) is not met, the Competition Authority may order that the concentration be notified if there exist particular reasons therefore. The Competition Authority has only ordered notification in a handful of cases so far. Correspondingly, the parties may notify such a merger voluntarily. This may be advisable if the merger leads to high market shares in the Swedish market or a substantial part thereof.

7 Do foreign-to-foreign mergers have to be notified and is there a local effects test?

Foreign-to-foreign mergers are, in the view of the Competition Authority, caught by the Act and have to be notified when the turnover thresholds are met. In practice, this means, for instance, that the creation of a full-function joint venture with no, or limited, foreseen activities in Sweden can still be caught by the Act's merger rules if the parent companies meet the thresholds.

Notification and clearance timetable

- 8** What are the deadlines for filing? Are there sanctions for not filing and are they applied in practice?

There are no pecuniary sanctions for not notifying a merger to the Competition Authority. However, should the Competition Authority become aware of an unnotified merger, it may order the parties to notify, subject to a fine.

Should the Competition Authority find that a completed merger was not permitted under the Act, it also retains the right to bring an action before the Stockholm District Court for the divestiture of the acquired entity. Failure to notify brings with it the risk of the merger being annulled *ex post facto*. In practice, although depending on the circumstances of each particular case, this has so far generally proved a minor risk.

Filing under the Act can be made as soon as the undertakings concerned can demonstrate to the Competition Authority a good faith intention to implement the concentration, but has to be made prior to their implementation of the concentration. This means that an unsigned copy of the agreement or a letter of intent is normally sufficient as a basis for notification. There are practical advantages in early contact with the Competition Authority, as it may then commence an informal investigation prior to formal notification.

- 9** Who is responsible for filing and are filing fees required?

A merger should be notified by the merging parties or the party or parties acquiring control. There are no filing fees.

- 10** What are the waiting periods and does implementation of the transaction have to be suspended prior to clearance?

From the date of receipt of a complete notification, the Competition Authority has 25 working days in which to take a decision either that there are no grounds for action or that it will initiate a special investigation of the merger. However, if an undertaking offers commitments during this period with a view to having the merger cleared by the Competition Authority, the preliminary investigation period is increased to 35 working days. The Competition Authority has 10 working days from submission of a notification to inform the parties whether the notification is complete.

Before the deadline for preliminary examination, no party to the concentration may take any steps to complete the merger. However, the Competition Authority may decide to waive this standstill requirement. The Competition Authority also has the power to order the parties to respect the standstill requirement, subject to a fine.

After a decision to carry out a special investigation, the Competition Authority has an additional three months in which to lodge an application with the Stockholm District Court for a prohibition of the merger. The three-month period may be extended by the Stockholm District Court providing the notifying parties agree to it or there are compelling reasons for doing so.

- 11** What are the possible sanctions involved in closing before clearance and are they applied in practice?

Despite the fact that there are no pecuniary sanctions involved when closing takes place prior to clearance (unless the Competition Authority has ordered the parties to respect the standstill requirement subject to a fine), this nonetheless entails an obvious risk, namely that the Competition Authority and the courts will not clear the merger. In such cases, divestiture of the company or purchased assets will have to take place. As mentioned above, this has so far proved a minor risk in practice.

- 12** What solutions might be acceptable to permit closing before clearance in a foreign-to-foreign merger?

The Competition Authority may, for example, require the parties to divest certain assets, even located outside of Sweden, to remedy competition issues on the Swedish market.

- 13** Are there any special merger control rules applicable to public takeover bids?

The Act does not include any special rules applicable to public takeover bids. However, it provides that a prohibition of a merger will have no effect on the validity of acquisitions made on a Swedish or foreign stock exchange, on another authorised marketplace or at a public auction. In such cases, the buyer may instead be required to divest what has been acquired.

The Act does not contain any explicit rule similar to the one in the EC Merger Regulation to the effect that the standstill rule does not prevent formal implementation of a public bid in the sense that the acquirer may formally take over the shares as long as he does not vote for them. However, the Competition Authority takes the view that the same principle applies under Swedish competition law.

- 14** What is the level of detail required in the preparation of a filing?

Filing under the Act requires the use of a specific form, which has been revised following the enactment of the new Competition Act. The form must be filled out in Swedish, and at present no official English translation is available. The form sets out a number of questions on the parties, competitors, market conditions, etc, similar to Form CO requirements for notifications under the EC Merger Regulation.

The information required by the form is relatively extensive. It is, however, sometimes possible to secure, on an informal basis, waivers from the Competition Authority as regards certain information which the Authority deems unnecessary in the specific case. The time necessary for the preparation of the form varies widely from case to case, depending mainly on whether the transaction involves any 'affected markets', as does the size of the notification.

Discussions on waivers from the Competition Authority as regards the information required may be held during pre-notification meetings with the Authority.

- 15** What is the timetable for clearance and can it be speeded up?

Upon receipt of a complete notification, the Competition Authority has 25 working days in which to conduct a preliminary investigation (phase I). However, if an undertaking offers commitments during this period with a view to having the merger cleared by the Competition Authority, the preliminary investigation period is increased to 35 working days. Before the end of the preliminary investigation, the Competition Authority either has to clear the merger or decide to initiate an in-depth (second-stage) investigation. Should an in-depth investigation be initiated (phase II), the Competition Authority shall, within three months, either clear the merger or file an application with the Stockholm District Court (the District Court) requesting that the merger be prohibited. If no action has been brought within that time period, the merger is deemed to have been cleared. The court may extend the three-month period with the parties' consent, or if there are otherwise compelling reasons.

Should the Competition Authority make an application to the District Court, the District Court must come to a decision within six months. Again, this time period is subject to prolongation with the parties' consent or if there are otherwise compelling reasons.

An appeal against the District Court decision lies with the Market Court, which must pass final judgment within three months from the last day of appeal.

No measures may be taken in respect of a merger, notified or not, when more than two years have passed since the concentration occurred.

16 What are the typical steps and different phases of the investigation?

The timetables applicable to first stage and in-depth investigations (phase I and II respectively) are described under question 15. There are no set timetables for hearings, requests for information or other measures during the investigation. The Competition Authority may, from time to time, in the course of the investigation, as it deems appropriate, send questions to the parties and request additional information.

When the notification has been filed, the Competition Authority will normally contact competitors and other third parties listed in the notification and invite comments on the proposed merger. Depending on the situation, comments from third parties may carry more or less weight. There is no formal distinction between different classes of third parties. No companies other than those concerned in the acquisition are treated as parties to the procedure.

Substantive assessment

17 What is the substantive test for clearance?

Under the Act, a merger shall be prohibited if it would significantly impede the existence or development of effective competition in Sweden as a whole, or a substantial part thereof, in particular as a result of the creation or strengthening of a dominant position. However, a merger may be prohibited only if such a prohibition does not involve 'the setting aside of essential national interests of security or resources'. This exclusion is unlikely to apply other than in very special circumstances.

A number of factors will be taken into account in assessing the transaction, such as market shares, barriers to entry and buying power.

18 Is there a special substantive test for joint ventures?

In addition to the substantive test, the Act provides that, to the extent the creation of a full-function joint venture has as its object or effect the coordination of the competitive behaviour of undertakings that remain independent, such coordination shall be appraised in accordance with the criteria of the provisions on anti-competitive cooperation between undertakings.

19 What are the 'theories of harm' that the authorities will investigate?

The Competition Authority can in principle consider all the above-mentioned types of negative effects of a concentration when evaluating if it would significantly impede the existence or development of effective competition in Sweden as a whole, or a substantial part thereof.

20 To what extent are non-competition issues (such as industrial policy or public interest issues) relevant in the review process?

As mentioned above, elements outside the competition law field may be taken into account by reference to the criterion that the prohibition of a merger cannot take place if that would jeopardise important national interests of security or resources. The courts have not yet had the opportunity to interpret this criterion. However, obviously the situations where these exclusions can be invoked are rare.

21 To what extent does the authority take into account economic efficiencies in the review process?

The Act does not explicitly mention economic efficiencies. In practice, economic efficiencies have normally not been taken into account by the Competition Authority. However, with the new substantive test introduced by the Act, the Competition Authority is likely to put more focus on economic efficiencies in the future.

Remedies and ancillary restraints

22 What powers do the authorities have to prohibit or otherwise interfere with a transaction?

The Competition Authority itself has rather limited powers as far as enforcement is concerned. Should it consider that a merger ought to be prohibited, it will have to file an application to this effect with the District Court, which will decide the issue. The court may order that the merger should not go ahead or, if it is considered sufficient, impose other measures such as an order to divest or to take other pro-competitive action. As mentioned above, any undertaking given by the parties may be linked to a fine. Acquisitions made on a stock exchange or any other recognised market or at an auction may not be prohibited; instead the disposal of the assets acquired may be ordered.

23 Is it possible to remedy competition issues, for example by giving divestment undertakings or behavioural remedies?

As an alternative to a prohibition, an order for the disposal of an undertaking or a business activity in whole or in part or an order to take some other measure having a favourable effect on competition may be made by the District Court.

Negotiated solutions to problematic issues may be proposed at any stage during the procedure. The companies concerned normally present such solutions in the form of an undertaking to the Competition Authority. Structural, as well as behavioural, undertakings are accepted by the Competition Authority. However, the Competition Authority normally favours divestments, as opposed to behavioural undertakings. Compliance with such undertakings may be enforced through a fine set by the Stockholm District Court on application from the Competition Authority, to be imposed in the event of a breach of the undertaking.

24 What are the basic conditions and timing issues applicable to a divestment or other remedy?

As mentioned, negotiated solutions may be proposed by the parties at any stage during the procedure. The basic conditions applicable to a divestment or any other remedy are, in short, that they are sufficient to eliminate the adverse effects of the concentration. Proposals to divest, or any other remedy, are normally presented by the parties concerned at the end of the in-depth investigation, when the parties have received the Competition Authority's 'working material' (similar to the European Commission's statement of objections).

Under the Act, a divestment order or an order to take another measure in order to remedy the competition concerns raised by a concentration must not exceed what is required in order to eliminate the adverse effects of the restriction of competition.

25 What is the track record of the authority in requiring remedies in foreign-to-foreign mergers?

The Competition Authority has on occasion obliged the parties to a foreign-to-foreign merger to divest assets located outside of Sweden to remedy competition issues on the Swedish market.

26 In what circumstances will the clearance decision cover related arrangements (ancillary restrictions)?

A decision by the Competition Authority not to take any action with regard to a concentration also covers restrictions directly related and necessary to the implementation of the notified concentration. There are no specific guidelines published by the Competition Authority, but the preparatory works indicate that the European Commission's Notice on ancillary restraints shall give guidance in matters concerning such restraints under the Act.

Involvement of other parties or authorities

27 Are customers and competitors involved in the review process and what rights do complainants have?

Customers and competitors will be invited to comment on the proposed merger, as mentioned above. No companies other than those concerned by the merger are treated as parties to the procedure.

28 What publicity is given to the process and how do you protect commercial information, including business secrets, from disclosure?

The Competition Authority does not publish any notices following receipt of a notification and the initiation of a procedure, but only publishes the final decision in the case (and once a notification has been filed, the notification is mentioned briefly in the Authority's case list, which is publicly available, inter alia, on the Authority's website). As for confidentiality, whereas the general rule in Sweden is that all documents held by a public authority are in the public domain, rules on confidentiality and business secrets are contained in the Public Access and Secrecy Act. The Act provides that information shall be secret if it relates to a party's business, innovations or R&D, insofar as disclosure would cause the party to suffer injury. There must, however, be particularly strong reasons for refusing full access to the file to a party to the proceedings.

Information provided by the parties during pre-notification contact is covered by absolute secrecy, that is, without the requirement that disclosure would cause injury.

In situations where the granting of confidentiality has been an issue, the Competition Authority has adopted a generally cooperative attitude in relation to the party requesting confidentiality.

29 Do the authorities cooperate with antitrust authorities in other jurisdictions?

The Competition Authority may, where appropriate, contact formally or informally the European Commission or any national competition authority. In 2003 Sweden signed an agreement with Denmark,

Norway and Iceland on cooperation on competition issues. As a result of the agreement, information exchange between the national competition authorities concerned is facilitated, inter alia, in the area of merger control.

Under the Community merger control rules, the Competition Authority cooperates with the European Commission and the other member states' competition authorities concerning referral cases.

30 Are there also rules on foreign investment, special sectors or other relevant approvals?

The Act contains no special merger rules relating to particular areas of the economy. However, such rules are sometimes contained in sector-specific legislation.

Judicial review

31 What are the opportunities for appeal or judicial review?

As noted above, the procedure moves into a judicial stage as soon as the Competition Authority wishes to block a merger. The decisions and orders of the Stockholm District Court may be appealed to the Market Court, but requires leave to appeal. There is also a possibility, subsequent to a decision by any of the above courts, of reviewing the decision. If the review is based on the decision having been taken on the basis of incorrect facts, the review must be requested within one year of the date of the decision.

32 What is the usual time frame for appeal or judicial review?

From the date of receipt of a complete notification, the Competition Authority has 25 working days (or 35 working days if commitments have been offered, see question 15) in which to decide either that there are no grounds for action or that it shall initiate a special investigation. After a decision to carry out a special investigation, the Competition Authority has a further three months in which to bring an action before the Stockholm District Court against the concentration. If the Competition Authority decides to bring such an action, the court then has six months to decide if the concentration shall be blocked or not. If an appeal is made against the judgment of the Stockholm District Court, the Market Court shall make a ruling within three months of expiry of the period of appeal.

All the time limits mentioned above, except the 25 or 35 days limit during phase I, may be extended if the notifying parties agree to it or there are special reasons for an extension. The phase I limit cannot be extended in any other way than by the notifying parties offering commitments, thereby extending the investigation period from 25 to 35 days.



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Enforcement practice and future developments

33 What is the recent enforcement record of the authorities, particularly for foreign-to-foreign mergers?

To date, the Competition Authority has sought the prohibition of a total of six mergers, three of which occurred under the former merger rules, applicable prior to April 2000. One of the earlier cases was settled out of court, and the two others were both finally cleared by the courts. In a recent case, the Competition Authority's action was dismissed due to procedural reasons. The other two cases where the Competition Authority has taken action in order to block a merger since the entry into force of the substantial amendments of the Act's merger control rules in April 2000 (bringing the Swedish rules in line with the EC Merger Regulation) concerned the proposed merger of the two existing Swedish giro services, the Postal Giro and the Bank Giro, and SF Bio's contemplated acquisition of its main rival in the Swedish cinema market, Sandrews Metronome Sverige. In both cases, the transaction was abandoned by the parties following the Competition Authority's action.

As noted above (see question 7), foreign-to-foreign mergers are caught by the Act when the turnover thresholds are met. The Act

provides that a merger shall be prohibited if it would significantly impede the existence or development of effective competition in Sweden as a whole, or a substantial part thereof, in particular as a result of the creation or strengthening of a dominant position. Consequently, the decisive factor for analysing a merger (foreign-to-foreign or not) is its effect on the Swedish market. Nevertheless, it can be noted that none of the six cases mentioned above concerned a foreign-to-foreign transaction.

34 What are the current enforcement concerns of the authorities?

In 2007 the Competition Authority finished a survey targeting the electricity sector. Since then, it is not possible to identify any special enforcement concerns of the Competition Authority.

35 Are there current proposals to change the legislation?

A new Competition Act came into force on 1 November 2008. There are no current proposals for additional legislative changes.



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