

Modernisation of the EC Competition rules a year and a half later

BRUSSELS (13-15.10.2005) - First impressions from a freshman...

Dear friends,

I had just started my new position as an associate with my law firm when our human resources manager asked me if I would like to attend an AIJA seminar in competition law, organized by the AIJA Competition Commission. I have to admit that at the time I knew little or nothing about AIJA, but I thought: Could there really be a better way to start a legal career in European law!?

The topic of the seminar was really up to date, and also quite ambitious. During two whole days of presentations and discussions the highly qualified legal experts from both private sector and from European and national institutions shared with us their aspects and views on the modernisation and decentralisation of the EC competition rules. Through the different speeches the question was raised whether the modernisation of the EC competition rules was a positive contribution or rather a step in the wrong direction. As one of the speakers, Dr. Thomas Funke, an antitrust lawyer with Osborne Clarke in Germany, put it: Should the modernisation be viewed as a "stairway to heaven" or rather as a "highway to hell"?

This year in Norway we celebrate the centennial for the demise of our famous dramatist Henrik Ibsen. I do not think I exaggerate if I say that there is not a speech given or an article written in Norway this year that do not contain an Ibsen quotation (!) So let me be no exemption - freely translated one of the more famous Ibsen quotations goes like this:

"I rather ask, my calling is not to answer"

In true Ibsen spirit I will not try to answer Dr. Funke's question. Rather, I've been asked to share with you some of my thoughts and first impressions of the social aspects of AIJA.



Even though the seminar took place in the middle of October, Brussels was bathed in sunshine like on a shiny summer day. Brussels is the most suited location for a seminar on European competition law, and so the weather and location obliged by making a great frame around the professional as well as the social part of the programme. Personally, I was especially impressed by the welcome reception on Thursday night hosted with great generosity by Van Bael & Bellis, and of course the fabulous dinner at Hotel Le Metropole on Friday night. For those of us who stayed on Saturday night, we even got around to try wine tasting in one of the charming and informal restaurants in Brussels.

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As I am writing this article I have just returned from my second AIJA seminar. The AIJA European Law Commission recently arranged a seminar on state aid in Bilbao. With its Action Plan on state aid the Commission aims to enhance efficiency of the state aid policy and improve its rules. During our time in Bilbao we were given a complete introduction to the seminar, operating on a very practical basis.

I would like to give a special thanks to the local bar association in Bilbao for taking so good care of all of us, and for showing us all the great sights of Bilbao! The Guggenheim Museum was of course impressive, and we all got to experience dinner in a traditional sidrería!

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From my experience so far I am impressed by the professional quality of the AIJA seminars. The informal and open approach among the participants and the true interest everybody takes in learning about the different views and challenges experienced in each country represented has filled me with new energy and motivation both times. Already I have made many friends, and I have also taken professional advantage of contacts that I have made during the seminars.

I am already looking forward to my next AIJA seminar, and I hope to see you there to!

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