


## COMPETITION LAW AND CARTELS OF LARGE RETAIL CHAINS: IMPACT ON CONSUMER WELFARE

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**Abstract.** *Market economies function efficiently only in the presence of a well-defined and consistently enforced legal framework against anti-competitive practices. The cartelization of large retail chains significantly threatens consumer welfare, which is particularly evident through price increases and reduced service quality and options available to consumers. Cartels pose a huge threat to the economy by undermining fair competition, restricting free competition and violating market fairness. This paper analyzes the regulatory framework for combating cartel behaviour in Serbia, with special reference to practical cases illustrating the disruption of competition caused by cartels formed among major retail entities. It also sheds some light on how such forms of anti-competitive practices directly affect the citizens' quality of life and obstruct small market players. The author discusses some of the best practices in combating retail chain cartels in Germany and France, and the potential incorporation of such practices in Serbia to combat large retail chain cartels. These countries are known for having developed stern antitrust laws that do suppress cartels as well as institutional mechanisms. This paper primarily aims to underscore the necessity of advancing regulatory mechanisms and fostering greater public awareness about the detrimental impact of retail cartels on market fairness and consumer welfare.*

**Key words:** *competition, cartels, retail chains, consumer welfare.*

### 1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND CASE STUDIES IN COMBATING CARTELS

#### 1.1. Legal framework for combating cartels in Serbia

Competition can be distorted in many ways, one of the worst forms being cartelization. By nature, every cartel agreement is clandestine and involves collusion among competitors by way of concerting prices, allocating markets, and jointly stifling competition. In other

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words, an effective fight against cartels must involve the placing of an appropriate regulatory framework in place, aligned with prevailing trends in the fight against this form of anti-competitive conduct. Secondly, such a framework should be flexible and capable of adapting to new forms of cartel behaviour that are usually engendered through changes in market dynamics, among other factors, and propelled by technological changes. The currently applicable Competition Protection Act (hereinafter: CPA)<sup>1</sup> defines restrictive agreement as an agreement between market participants aimed at or resulting in "a significant restriction, distortion, or prevention of competition in the territory of the Republic of Serbia" (Article 10 § 1 of the CPA). The legislative framework is substantially harmonized with the relevant *acquis* of the European Union (hereinafter: the EU), thus establishing a sound basis for combating competition distortions due to cartel agreements.

The institutional framework for combating all forms of anti-competitive practices is embodied in the Competition Protection Act (CPA). Pursuant to Article 20 of the CPA, the Commission for Protection of Competition (hereinafter: CPC) is a legal entity which operates as an autonomous and independent organization exercising powers in accordance with the law. Considering the covert nature of restrictive agreements, the legislature's effort to introduce unannounced checks as one of the tools in the struggle against cartels is very commendable and corresponds to legal customs of states following the classical approach to anti-competitive behaviour control. This methodology aligns with best practices in comparative regimes committed to stamping out anti-competitive behaviour and further enhances effectiveness in dealing with cartels through the legal system. Under Article 53 § 1 of the CPA, an unannounced search by the authorized representatives of the CPC can be conducted when a reliable presumption arises that a party in possession of such evidence, or a third party, could possibly destroy, alter or cover it up. However, it must be borne in mind that the development of modern information technologies largely dictates the development of modalities of the cartels' agreement and that sophisticated negotiation techniques often exclude any trace, which leads to the fact that an unannounced inspection of the business premises of potential cartels will not always result in the collection of evidentiary materials. Price algorithms are one of the common forms of competition distortion in the digital world (Stefanović, 2023:5). In light of these challenges, in order to provide an effective response to new forms of cartel behaviour, it is necessary to develop new investigative methods, such as the technique of advanced analysis of digital communications.

Cartel agreements are agreements between companies operating at the same level of the manufacturing or distribution chain. Thus, they are a type of horizontal restrictive agreement that distort competition among members of large retail chains. In other words, they are agreements made by rival businesses, including agreements between competing companies (Stefanović, 2015:6). Prominent retail companies generate high profits and, thus, have considerable financial and technological capabilities, allowing them to use sophisticated and complex forms of illegal price-fixing, manipulation of the marketplace, and anti-competitive behaviour. Consequently, it is critical that the reaction of the regulatory body is effective and aligned with modern technological developments. One feasible mechanism for strengthening the anti-cartel mechanism is through computer algorithms fuelled by artificial intelligence (AI), capable of following price fluctuations in real-time and notifying regulators about suspicious collusive activity between competitors regarding price-fixing (Harrington, Imhof, 2022: 144).

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<sup>1</sup> Competition Protection Act (CPA), *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, 51/2009 and 95/2013.

## 1.2. Case studies

In Serbia, the actors of one of the most famous cases of cartel of large retail companies were some of the largest sports equipment stores. Their association in a cartel lasted 20 years and, considering the serious consequences for consumers, this can be considered one of the most serious distortions of competition in Serbia. The subject matter of proceedings in this case was cartel behaviour and distortion of competition through price-fixing in resale. In particular, it was determined that the "N SPORT" company (as the seller) included a clause in all sales contracts obliging the buyers (distributors or retail chains) to adhere to the prices determined by "N SPORT" as the seller. This means that "N SPORT" controlled the prices that customers could set when reselling the product, which is characteristic of cartel practices (CPC, 2017).<sup>2</sup> The ramifications of this cartel agreement are evident in the involvement of its partners, some of the top sports equipment retailers in Serbia, which thereby exerted a significant influence on the market. The CPC determined that companies involved violated the Competition Protection Act by entering into restrictive agreements with the purpose of stabilizing prices for future sales. These agreements were deemed void and unlawful; the entities involved were ordered to refrain from further practices of restricting competition and imposed fines in proportion to their annual revenue. The companies had to pay the fines within six months and furnish evidence of payment; the decision was published in the "Official Gazette RS" and posted on the CPC website.

Another case that came to attention of both experts and the general public at the end of 2024 concerns the potential violation of competition by the merger of the four largest trade chains in Serbia. The CPC *ex officio* initiated the procedure for examining the alleged violation of competition against the companies Delhaize, Mercator, Univerexport, and DIS in order to determine the existence of the violation of competition provisions from Article 10 of the CPA (CPC, 2024).<sup>3</sup> In its conclusion on the initiated procedure, the CPC stated that it monitored the movement of prices of eight food products in the period from April to September 2024 and observed that the prices were the same or similar at all retail chains. Based on these *indicia*, the CPC conducted an unannounced investigation at the premises of the companies involved, in the course of which the CPC representatives collected a considerable amount of evidence supporting suspicions about these companies' participation in an illegal price-fixing scheme.

Notwithstanding the administrative nature of the CPC investigations on competition abuses, we should not disregard the fact that the presumption of innocence, as the fundamental criminal law principle, could apply in cases pertaining to such cartels. In addition, the severity of potential consequences stemming from such cartel agreements is emphasized through actions initiated against cartel participants by the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, the Special Anti-Corruption Department, in order to clarify whether such companies' conduct amounts to a criminal offense under Article 229 of the Criminal Code (RTV, 2024).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Komisija za zaštitu konkurencije/ Commission for Protection of Competition (2017). *Decision 4/0-02-89/2017-31*, <https://kzk.gov.rs/kzk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/R-40-02-892017-312.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Komisija za zaštitu konkurencije/Commission for Protection of Competition (2024), *Conclusion 4/0-01-865/2024-1*; <https://kzk.gov.rs/kzk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Zakljucak-o-pokretanju-postupka-trgovinski-lanci.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> RTV/ Radio-Television Vojvodina (2024). *The Prosecution Office investigates the operations of Delhaize, Mercator S, Univereksport-import and DIS*; [https://www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/hronika/tuzilastvo-ispituje-poslovanje-deleza-merkator-s-univereksport-importa-i-dis-a\\_1576259.html](https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/hronika/tuzilastvo-ispituje-poslovanje-deleza-merkator-s-univereksport-importa-i-dis-a_1576259.html)

The examples discussed above clearly reveal the tremendous damage cartels cause to small retail companies by denying them the chance for fair and beneficial competition and thus exerting a real harmful impact on lowering the general level of customer welfare. Collusion in price-fixing by powerful market players restricts buyers' ability to enjoy competitive pricing, reduces variety in goods and services, and helps maintain artificially high prices of either sports equipment or essential food products.

## 2. THE IMPACT OF RETAIL CHAIN CARTELS ON CONSUMER WELFARE

### 2.1. Price inflation and reduced purchasing power

The collaboration between large retail companies creates a sort of artificial price-fixing, one that is counterintuitive to a free marketplace where prices are determined through participants' competitive activity. High prices not only impose a considerable financial burden on consumers of goods and services but they also restrict consumers' options because artificial price-fixing reduces the variety of options in a marketplace (Faster Capital, 2024).<sup>5</sup> A marketplace with no competitive dynamics tends to be unattractive for emerging ventures. In environments with legal uncertainty, where compliance with antitrust laws cannot be assured, such ventures have difficulty in competing effectively. As a result, such an environment profoundly impacts their alternative strategies, prompting them to avoid specific countries in their investment plans. Market competition exerts downward pressure on prices while increasing the range of consumers' purchase options. Competition dynamics also contributes to improving the overall quality of goods and service (Busso, Galiani, 2014: 3).

In times of market disruptions, consumers experience considerable difficulty. As a larger proportion of their incomes is spent on food and basic life necessities, price hikes occasioned by collusion deals lessen their purchasing power. Consequently, consumption drops and it ultimately impacts the overall economy through reduced demand and a slow pace in retail sector growth. Given that economically disadvantaged groups spend a high proportion of their earnings on basic life necessities, any rise in food prices constitutes an immediate danger to such groups' basic living standards. Hence, policymakers interested in marketplace competition must view anti-competitive behaviour not simply as impediments which should be removed in order to have a more efficient marketplace but also as a concern about social fairness and economic viability. Having large retail cartels collude to drive up prices of basic items creates an impact that extends beyond financial efficiency, putting at danger the basic living standards of society's most disadvantaged groups (UNCTAD, 2013: 32 ).

One of the most famous cases of cartel association of large trade chains which had a great impact on the consumer welfare was recorded in Belgium, where major retail chains Carrefour, Colruyt and Delhaize entered into a cartel agreement to increase the prices of general hygiene and cosmetic products. In 2015, the Belgian Competition Authority imposed a €174m fine for cartel arrangements on the major retail chains Carrefour, Colruyt and Delhaize. As these retail chains coordinated price increases in the hygiene and cosmetic products between 2002 and 2007, it constitutes a violation of competition involving price-fixing and reducing competition,

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<sup>5</sup> Faster Capital (2024). *Effects of Cartels on Consumers and the Economy*, <https://fastercapital.com/topics/effects-of-cartels-on-consumers-and-the-economy.html>

which created the conditions for a higher price of products on the market. The companies agreed to take responsibility in exchange for reduced fines (Belgian Competition Authority, 2021).<sup>6</sup>

Although some of the most economically developed countries in the EU have traditionally had strong cartel mechanisms and practices, the cartelization of large retail chains and the abuse of market power are serious problems. Participants of one of the most famous cases of cartel association of retail chains in Germany were the companies Edeka, Rewe, Kaufland, Metro, and Netto. The German Federal Cartel Office imposed fines totaling €34.3 million on the manufacturer of Ritter Sport chocolate (Alfred Ritter GmbH & Co. KG) and two retail chains (EDEKA and REWE) for illegal vertical price-fixing. In the period from 2005 to 2008, these companies agreed to adjust the retail prices of chocolate bars; in exchange, the retail chains received financial benefits and concessions on the purchase price. The fines were imposed in accordance with the statutory guidelines on the assessment of fines in cartel cases (Bundeskartellamt, 2015: 1-2).<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2. Long-term consequences for the labor market and wages

The collaboration between large retail companies not only affects the purchasing power of consumers but also has indeterminate consequences on the future direction of the workforce and compensation packages for employees. Price-fixing agreements negatively impact the labour market by reducing competition between employers, thus leading to a reduction in wages. This happens when employers agree neither to raise wages nor to poach employees from each other. Thus, employees lose the opportunity to negotiate better working conditions or switch to other employers (Heinemann, 2020:373). The cartelization of large retail chains leads to tightening the labour market and reduced competition among employers, which has a direct impact on the bargaining power of employees. Under conditions of reduced competition, employees have fewer opportunities to choose between different employers. This reduces the pressure on retail chains to improve working conditions, increase wages, or offer better benefits.

Cartels can have a negative impact on wages by setting wages below the competitive level, creating a situation where employers collectively reduce the possibility of wage increases. If an employer raises wages to attract employees, competitors may set their wages even higher, thus reducing the advantage. This process, known as parallelism or tacit coordination, can lead to an equilibrium with wages below the market level, even without an explicit agreement between the companies (Masur, Posner, 2023:548). The impact of cartels on the wage determination process can significantly hinder the progress of the labour market in the long run. In competition-restricted scenarios, employees are subjected to a loss of bargaining power. This lack of competitive forces leads to challenges in securing better working conditions and higher wages.

In addition, the monopolization by large retail conglomerates restricts the options available to potential employers in the labour market. As a result, employees may become dependent on employers who face little competitive forces regarding their products.

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<sup>6</sup> Belgian Competition Authority (2021). *The Investigation and Prosecution Service of the Belgian Competition Authority adopts its first settlement decision and imposes fines amounting to 174,000,000 EUR* (22 June 2015), [https://www.belgiancompetition.be/sites/default/files/content/download/files/201506022\\_press\\_release\\_9\\_bca.pdf](https://www.belgiancompetition.be/sites/default/files/content/download/files/201506022_press_release_9_bca.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Bundeskartellamt (2015). Case Summary: Case B 10 - 041/14 *Bundeskartellamt vs. Alfred Ritter GmbH Co. KG, EDEKA and REWE*, [https://www.bundeskartellamt.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidung/EN/Fallberichte/Kartellverbot/2015/B10-41-14.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=2](https://www.bundeskartellamt.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidung/EN/Fallberichte/Kartellverbot/2015/B10-41-14.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2)

Eventually, this situation can result in a reduction in labour mobility, thus worsening the challenges faced by employees in securing favourable conditions. Such agreements limit employees' mobility and negatively impact competition by preventing new companies from hiring employees with the necessary skills to succeed in the market (Geiss, Caproni, Vranesevic, 2023: 1). In addition, the establishment of strong cooperation between large trade chains indicates their intention to eliminate smaller market players in the long term, who have a harder time to survive in the environment of impaired market competition due to limited access to retail channels and unfavourable purchasing conditions. In such a business environment, where market competition practically does not exist, employees become dependent on the employer and aware of significantly reduced opportunities for changing employers; consequently, they agree to worse working conditions.

### **2.3. Effects on innovation and product quality**

When large retail chains form a cartel, there is often no need to compete with each other. This implies that there is no motivation for them to innovate or improve, as their profits are guaranteed by the agreed high prices. Without competition, companies have fewer incentives to improve their products or processes. Price cartels hinder innovation by stifling competition, thus reducing the incentive for companies to improve their services and products. In negotiated price contexts, companies have little incentive to invest in research and development programs. This results in slowing down technological advancement and improvement of existing products. In addition, cartels often limit product assortment in a move to sustain high prices, thus reducing product offerings in the marketplace. On the other hand, companies are incentivized to innovate in order to lure clients and build their competitive position in the market (Brahma, Sharma, 2024: 5).

In the conditions of the cartel association of large trade chains, there is a reduction in the range of products offered on the market, which narrows the choice for consumers. Since the increase of prices and profits is at the core of the cartel agreement, the needs and preferences of consumers are neglected. As a result, the dynamics of the market are disrupted, which gradually leads to a decline in the quality and variety of products. The lack of innovation and competition in such an environment results in stagnation in the offer of new products because cartel groups have no need to invest in research and development or improvement of existing products. Two examples from Great Britain illustrate that the strengthening of competition is an incentive for increasing innovation and the quality of products and services. The first example refers to former nationalized industries (gas, electricity, telecommunications), which achieved price reductions and increased innovation after the destruction of labour union cartels and producer monopolies. These industries have become more competitive, allowing greater efficiency and a better response to market needs. In the case of the British automobile sector, competition from overseas led to a scaling back as the sector struggled to adjust to the demands of the global market. The rigid labour market shares some blame for the faltering competitive edge, as it restricted the sector's capacity for swift adaptation and innovation (Epstein, 2003: 87).

The examples from Great Britain, a country which played a key role in the development of the modern market economy (starting with the industrial revolution) and which implemented significant privatization and deregulation reforms during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, clearly illustrate the impact of competition on innovation and product quality. The positive correlation between non-price competition intensity and innovation, particularly in the case

of product innovations, is not due to the effects of individual competition dimensions; with the exception of product range diversity, which plays a subordinate role in this case, all competition dimensions contribute to the clearly positive correlation with the innovation indicators (Arvantis, Arx, 2004: 9).

### 3. ENFORCEMENT AND PENALTIES: IMPACT ON CONSUMER WELFARE IN THE RETAIL SECTOR

#### **3.1. Role of regulatory bodies in investigating retail cartels**

Uncovering cartel agreements of retail chains is an extremely complex task which entails a meticulous approach to the market data analysis, especially the pattern of price changes, the precise definition of the time frame for observing price movements, and close cooperation of legal and economic experts. Therefore, it is important that the employees of the competition protection authority are well trained and have a multidisciplinary approach to the problems of cartel collusion, which implies the application of economic and legal analysis instruments as well as the application of digital tools for market analysis, which is extremely important nowadays. The main challenge in detecting cartels is that firms tend to hide their illegal activity, making it difficult to distinguish cartel actions from ordinary competitive behaviour. For a cartel to have a serious negative impact, conditions must exist that allow for coordinated price increases. If these conditions are not present, it not only reduces the chances of damage but also increases the risk of errors in judgement, which can have serious consequences (Kaplou, 2018: 2).

Modern digital technologies have brought great opportunities for improving companies' operations. Product advertising through various media has become significantly more effective owing to precise targeting of consumers through algorithms and data analytics. However, while new technologies have significantly contributed to increasing the profitability of companies, they have concurrently enabled various types of anti-competitive behaviour. Digital platforms and modern algorithms, based on artificial intelligence, enable the harmonization of companies' price policies, which establishes a pattern of coordinated conduct and leads to the creation of cartels, even without an explicit companies' agreement. Digital algorithms impact price formation by enabling automated decision-making based on statistical methods and pattern recognition in large datasets, which can lead to more efficient price adjustments to market conditions (Mojašević, Cvetković, Dimovski, 2023: 12).

In the modern digital environment, competition authorities must ensure robust tools for combating mighty business chains. They must ensure market analyses and sector probes to evaluate the impact of algorithm distortion. Additionally, the regulation on business mergers should be strengthened in terms of algorithmic coordination and setting up of the juridical regulations for the prevention of tacit collusion through digital tools, while the antitrust policies must continuously improve in line with the changes in the tech field (OECD, 2017:3). In addition, constant education of employees in regulatory bodies is very important in order to keep them up to date with the new technological developments and ensure their use in investigations of cartel practices.

### 3.2. Penalties and their deterrent effect on cartel behavior

Strictly sanctioning the cartel behaviour of large retail chains must be a high-ranking priority on the agenda of competition policymakers. Prescribing and imposing high fines for anti-competitive behaviour, which significantly violates the basic postulates of competition and endangers the customer welfare, must have a deterrent effect on all companies which consider engaging in such illegal activities. Sanctioning cartel players intensifies competition and leads to lower-priced products, which in turn impacts the rise of consumer welfare.

The impact of the sanctions imposed on the participants of the cartel of large trade chains on the consumer welfare is primarily reflected in the renewed market formation of prices, determined solely by supply and demand for products, and not by the contractual coordination of large trade chains. In addition, drastic sanctioning of cartel participants can significantly change the direction of the company's business policy towards increasing investment in production innovation and improving business models in order to achieve a long-term competitive advantage without relying on contractual price-fixing (International Competition Network, 2011: 26).

### 3.3. Best practices in large retail cartel enforcement: Lessons from Germany and France

The two most economically developed countries of the EU, Germany and France, inherited the tradition of developed institutions and practices in the fight against anti-competitive practices. Following the contemporary business trends and anticipating the potential negative consequences of competitors' practices for market competition, these countries recognized the importance of digital algorithms in formation of cartel agreements of large trade chains, which ultimately resulted in the cooperation of the competition protection authorities of these countries. The cooperation between the Bundeskartellamt and the Autorité de la concurrence is aimed at developing joint strategies to detect anti-competitive practices and sanction cartels that resort to the use of algorithmic technologies (Bundeskartellamt, 2016: 15).

The German legislator has established high standards in the fight against cartel practices. A strong incentive for compliance by cartel participants is a system of combination of high administrative fines for company representatives who can be sentenced to an administrative fine of up to one million euros. Companies and associations of companies can be fined up to ten percent of annual turnover (Bundeskartellamt, 2025).<sup>8</sup> The large financial losses that companies involved in cartel activities may be exposed to have a strong deterrent effect. In addition, high penalties for individuals involved in cartel activities further strengthen the personal responsibility of decision-makers. A serious example of retail price-fixing is the coffee processing cartel, where leading producers coordinated price increases to artificially maintain high profits at the expense of consumers. The imposed penalty of €153.5 million indicates the significant economic damage that the cartel caused to the market, as well as the regulator's determination to sanction such practices. This case confirms that price coordination in the sectors of basic consumer goods can have serious consequences for competition and the consumer welfare (Wein, 2020: 26).

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<sup>8</sup> Bundeskartellamt (2025). *Cartel fine proceedings* Bundeskartellamt, [https://www.bundeskartellamt.de/EN/Tasks/Cartels/Cartel\\_fine\\_proceedings/Cartel\\_fine\\_proceedings\\_node.html#doc295408bodyText3](https://www.bundeskartellamt.de/EN/Tasks/Cartels/Cartel_fine_proceedings/Cartel_fine_proceedings_node.html#doc295408bodyText3)



The French anti-cartel system is characterized by a modern approach to uncovering cartel practices in the digital age. In this sense, the cooperation with the German regulatory body raised the capacities of the French regulator in the analysis of market data and anti-competitive patterns. The actors of one of the most famous cases of the cartel of large retail chains in France were the companies Casino Guichard-Perrachon and Intermarché. The investigation of the French regulatory body revealed that these companies had exchanged confidential information about prices and procurement strategies within the framework of a joint procurement alliance in the period before 2019. The investigation of the Autorité de la Concurrence found a distortion of competition, and the seriousness of the case was confirmed by the fines imposed in 2020. In addition, the wider impact on the EU's internal market caught the attention of the European Commission during the earlier stages of the investigation (Autorité de la concurrence, 2020: 15).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the author has provided a brief analysis of the regulatory framework pertaining to the fight against cartels, with special reference to the distortion of competition by horizontal restrictive agreements of large trade chains. The use of sophisticated price-fixing methods, such as digital algorithms, by large traders challenges the national regulatory authorities to work closely together and share information in order to detect and sanction cartels. The need for close cooperation between regulatory authorities in cartel detection stems from some the fact that suppliers come from other countries. Large retail chains in one country collaborate with foreign suppliers, sharing price and strategy information, but the domestic regulator lacks access to investigative data and evidence from abroad. The artificial formation of prices, outside the scope of market mechanisms, and the coordinated maintenance of prices at the same level for a longer period of time narrow the consumers' choice and access to more favourable offers and thus directly damage customer welfare and their purchasing power. The cartel of large trade chains has a particularly negative effect on the living standards of economically vulnerable population categories because it increases the cost of basic foodstuffs and reduces their availability. Therefore, it is essential that competition policymakers and competition protection bodies understand the cartels of large retail chains not only as a form of distortion of competition but also as a serious threat to the consumer welfare, and take decisive measures to sanction such illegal activities.

The example of cooperation between the German and French competition protection bodies shows the importance of establishing partnership between regulators in the fight against cartel practices, which enables faster detection of sophisticated price-fixing methods and more effective protection of consumers from the harmful consequences of such practices. Although the Serbian regulatory framework in the field of competition law is satisfactorily aligned with the EU legal *acquis*, the lack of capacity to monitor companies' digital and cross-border activities calls for establishing close cooperation and exchange of good practices between the CPC and the regional regulators which have positive results in combating the cartels of large trade chains. Consumer protection must be the ultimate goal of the fight against the cartels of large trade chains, particularly the consumers from the most economically vulnerable sections of society.

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## **PRAVO KONKURENCIJE I KARTEL VELIKIH MALOPRODAJNIH LANCA: UTICAJ NA ŽIVOTNI STANDARD POTROŠAČA**

*Kartelsko udruživanje velikih trgovinskih lanaca nanosi veliku štetu životnom standardu potrošača. U radu je, pre svega, dat pregled regulatornog okvira za borbu protiv antikonkurentne prakse, uz analizu relevantnih slučajeva narušavanja konkurencije od strane kartela velikih trgovinskih lanaca. Objasnjeno je kako karteli velikih trgovinskih lanaca utiču na tržišnu poziciju malih maloprodajnih objekata i životni standard potrošača. Posebno je istaknuto da ovakva praksa dovodi do povećanja cena, smanjenja kvaliteta usluga i ograničenog izbora, što direktno ugrožava kupovnu moć i ekonomsku stabilnost građana. Autor je objasnio značaj korišćenja dostignuća savremenih digitalnih tehnologija u otkrivanju kartela za fiksiranje cena i istakao neophodnost saradnje regulatornih tela u oblasti borbe protiv veštačkog formiranja cena korišćenjem digitalnih algoritama. U radu je dat predlog da srpsko telo za zaštitu konkurencije uspostavi partnerstvo sa regulatornim telom jedne od zemalja u okruženju, koje ima razvijenu praksu borbe protiv velikih trgovinskih kartela, po ugledu na saradnju nemačkih i francuskih regulatora.*

Ključne reči: konkurencija, karteli, trgovinski lanci, dobrobit potrošača.