



UAE pioneers AI-driven transformation of competition enforcement

The UAE is entering a new phase in the transformation of its competition enforcement framework through the development of a National Competition Platform (NCP), led by the UAE Ministry of Economy and Tourism. The tender for the project was announced on 24 April and reflects a deliberate approach to embed artificial intelligence directly into regulatory functions, positioning the UAE among the first jurisdictions to do so and signaling a structural shift towards faster and more data-driven enforcement.

The NCP is conceived as a single, integrated platform that will digitalize and automate the full spectrum of competition enforcement activities, including merger control, antitrust investigations and exemption procedures. It is expected to rely on agentic AI and advanced analytics to process submissions, generate case outputs for human validation and build a centralized competition data ecosystem.

The platform is expected to deliver accelerated processing timelines, including merger reviews reduced to 15 days; improved accuracy and transparency through automated workflows and audit trails; enhanced data-driven policymaking via a centralized market intelligence database, and strengthened investor confidence in the UAE competition regime. Taken together, these elements point to a material increase in both the speed and the depth of regulatory scrutiny.

The initiative is anchored in the UAE's broader AI governance framework. The country was the first to establish a dedicated AI ministry through the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and has adopted an ambitious AI Strategy 2031 aimed at integrating AI across government functions. In parallel, the UAE has issued AI ethics guidelines through the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Artificial Intelligence.

These guidelines emphasize fairness, transparency, accountability and human oversight. In practice, this means that while enforcement will be increasingly AI-assisted, decision-making will remain formally subject to human control, at least at the final stage.

From a competition law perspective, the implications are already quite clear:

First, the expected reduction of merger review timelines to around 15 days is likely to put pressure on transaction planning, as it leaves less time for iterative exchanges with the Competition Department of the UAE Ministry of Economy (Authority), which increases the importance of preparing complete and well-supported notifications from the outset.

Second, the creation of a centralized competition database, combined with the use of advanced analytics, should allow the Authority to monitor markets more closely and detect potential anticompetitive behavior more effectively.

Third, the use of AI tools in enforcement raises questions around transparency, particularly where automated outputs may influence how cases are selected, prioritized or assessed.

While enforcement activity in the UAE has so far remained relatively limited, this initiative, together with recent cases (such as the recent Poultry cartel case), suggests that enforcement may become faster, more consistent and potentially more active going forward. For business operating in the UAE, this is likely to translate into shorter procedural timelines and more systematic scrutiny of market behavior. In practice, parties may have less flexibility to address issues after submission and should expect the Authority to rely more heavily on data when assessing transactions or conduct.

At this stage, the initiative remains at the procurement phase following the announcement of the tender on 24 April, and no formal timeline for implementation has been communicated.



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