

Brussels, 2 March 2010

Antitrust: Commission welcomes Microsoft's roll-out of web browser choice

The European Commission welcomes the implementation by Microsoft of its commitment to give consumers in the European Union the opportunity to choose from a variety of browsers to access and surf the Internet. From the beginning of March, users of Windows PCs who have Internet Explorer as default web browser are being provided with a browser Choice Screen, designed to give them an effective and unbiased choice between their default and competing web browsers. This should ensure competition on the merits and allow consumers to benefit from technical developments and innovation both on the web browser market and on related markets, such as web-based applications.

Competition Commissioner Joaquin Almunia said: "*Web browsers are the gateway to the internet. Giving consumers the possibility to switch or try a browser other than that included in Windows will bring more competition and innovation in this important area to the benefit of European internet users. More competition between web browsers should also boost the use of open web standards which is critical for the further development of an open internet.*"

On 16 December 2009, the Commission made legally binding on Microsoft commitments offered by the US software company to address competition concerns the Commission had raised with respect to the tying of Microsoft's web browser, Internet Explorer, to its dominant client PC operating system, Windows (see [IP/09/1941](#)).

Specifically, Microsoft committed to make available for five years in the European Economic Area a "Choice Screen" enabling users of Windows XP, Windows Vista and Windows 7 to choose in an informed and unbiased manner which web browser(s) they want to install in addition to, or instead of, Microsoft's web browser.

Since the beginning of March, Internet users in the European Economic Area¹ who receive automatic updates for Windows and have Microsoft's browser set as default are being invited to choose from several browsers. In addition to Microsoft's web browser, the user will have the opportunity to choose between eleven additional web browsers, namely Apple Safari, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox and Opera which will be prominently displayed alongside Internet Explorer, and Avant Browser, Flock, Green Browser, K-Meleon, Maxthon, Sleipnir and Slim Browser which will be displayed if the user scrolls sideways.

It is expected that the browser Choice Screen will be displayed on over 100 million personal computers (PCs) in Europe between now and mid-May. The central page of the choice screen is also available to any internet user at <http://www.browserchoice.eu>.

¹ EU plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein

In compliance with the December commitments, computer manufacturers are now able to install competing browsers on Windows PCs instead of, or in addition to, Internet Explorer. Microsoft further committed not to retaliate against PC manufacturers who pre-install a non-Microsoft web browser on the PCs they ship and make it the default web browser.

Background

The December 2009 commitment decision followed a Statement of Objections sent to Microsoft in January 2009 (see [MEMO/09/15](#)) outlining the Commission's preliminary view that the company abused its dominant position in the market for client PC operating systems through the tying of Internet Explorer to Windows. The decision adopted pursuant to Article 9 of Regulation 1/2003 on the implementation of EU antitrust rules, did not conclude whether there was an abuse of a dominant position in the sense of Article 102 of the TFEU, but made the commitments legally binding on Microsoft. If Microsoft were to break its commitments, the Commission could impose a fine of up to 10% of Microsoft's total annual turnover without having to prove any violation of EU antitrust rules.

Under the decision's terms, Microsoft will report regularly to the Commission, on the implementation of the commitments and will make adjustments to the Choice Screen where necessary and proportionate upon the Commission's request. A clause in the commitments allows the Commission to review the commitments in two years under certain conditions.

For more information on the web browser choice screen see

http://ec.europa.eu/competition/consumers/web_browsers_choice_en.html