

Call for Papers

Innovation and the “Revamping” of Competition Law

Early Career Scholars Conference

6-7 November 2025 at the European University Institute, Florence

Innovation is the main contributor to economic welfare. This makes it crucial for public policy to support the innovation process. While competition policy is just one piece of this process, Mario Draghi’s recent report highlighted that it needs to be “revamped” with a deeper focus on innovation. Examining how firms create and capture value may help competition enforcers effectively promote and protect innovation.

With this year’s Early Career Scholars Conference, we ask participants to take Draghi seriously and think about competition law and policy from an innovation perspective. The conference will center on **four key themes: capabilities, ecosystems, mergers and acquisitions, and artificial intelligence.**

Capabilities is an analytical concept born in business and management science. Capabilities allow firms to explore new products and reposition themselves in new markets. A firm’s capability to recognize and address business opportunities and threats over time is crucial for its innovation efforts. But competition law scarcely explores business capabilities.

Ecosystems is also an analytical construct. Originally developed by James Moore, the concept grew to denote networks of collaborating firms that come together to deliver value under the leadership of an orchestrator. While competition scholars are more familiar with ecosystem theory, which featured in recent merger decisions such as *Booking/eTraveli*, they are merely scratching the surface, and the modern economy demands much more engagement.

The rise of artificial intelligence presents another challenge. Developing and operating artificial intelligence systems requires significant resources, investments, and capabilities. It also depends on carefully managing a vast network of players spanning semiconductors, cloud computing providers, software experts, data brokers, and more. As an emerging technology, artificial intelligence raises many questions for competition policy, including on governance, vertical integration, the role of data, and the importance of analytics capabilities.

Mergers and acquisitions are also at the forefront of the innovation debate. On one hand, well-known concepts are being questioned increasingly frequently. One can think of the turnover thresholds after *Illumina/GRAIL*, or the notion of potential competition after *Facebook/GIPHY*. On the other hand, additional challenges are arising, including the question of acqui-hires - transactions motivated mainly by the acquisition of talent instead of products or firms.

Amongst a wealth of possible questions, the following will be discussed at the event: **i) How can competition law incorporate capability analyses into its framework? For instance, can capability analyses inform the concept of potential competition? ii) Could we replace, or supplement, product market definitions with “capability markets”? How would this approach interact with recent initiatives to replace market definition with ecosystem analyses? iii) Are there ecosystem theories of harm that relate to innovation potential of ecosystem leaders and/or complementors? iv) How should merger law treat so-called “acqui-hires”? v) Do the dynamics of artificial intelligence products tend toward concentration or diffusion of market power? vi) How should competition law operationalize the “innovation defence” in merger analysis, as suggested by Mario Draghi? vii) How does the growing interest in innovation interact with the consumer welfare standard?**

For a lively discussion, we invite PhD candidates, Postdoctoral Researchers, Assistant Professors, Advanced Students wishing to pursue a PhD, and Early Career Professionals (within 5 years after commencing a professional activity) to submit their ideas for potential conference contributions. Proposals are **not limited** to the questions above, which are to be understood as **stimulators**, but not as conclusive regarding the potential scope of the submissions. The format is designed to address early career competition scholars and will be held in English. Co-authorship is allowed. We invite all researchers interested in presenting at the conference to submit **(1) an anonymised abstract** of no more than **500 words** and **(2) a short CV**, in separate PDF documents, to **CompetitionLaw@eui.eu** by **20 May 2025**. The selection will be communicated on **10 June 2025**. Selected participants are expected to send a **draft paper due 20 October 2025**. Papers will be published as a Dynamic Competition Initiative (DCI) Working Paper ahead of the conference. **Additional publication venues** for the final version of the papers will be provided.

Subject to available funding, we will cover part of the costs incurred by speakers. Reimbursement will be conditional on submitting draft papers by the indicated deadline.

We look forward to your submissions!

Selçukhan Ünekbaşı, European University Institute

Eva Fischer, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Lena Hornkohl, University of Vienna