

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **The Belgian Competition Authority condemns the ANSUL/SOMATI FIE and SICLI groups for manipulating public procurement procedures in the fire protection sector**

The Belgian Competition Authority ('BCA') has condemned ANSUL, SOMATI FIE and SICLI, three large players in the fire protection sector in Belgium, for manipulating public procurement procedures ('bid rigging') for more than seven years, mainly for the sale, hire and/or maintenance of extinguishers and hose reels.

In its decision, the BCA finds that the practices in question distorted competition in the provision of fire protection services in Belgium and infringed Belgian and European competition rules. The companies involved acknowledged their participation in the infringement and accepted the terms of a settlement proposed by the BCA's Investigation and Prosecution Service.

The BCA Prosecutor General, Damien Gerard, states:

*"The prosecution of bid rigging practices is a top priority for the BCA. These are among the most serious infringements of the competition rules. In the present case, the practices are particularly regrettable in view of their duration and the essential nature of the products in question for ensuring public safety, as well as the identity of the victims, which include schools, municipalities, assistance centers, social housing and public transport companies, etc. What is positive is that the companies involved have recognized the seriousness of the facts and the ANSUL/SOMATI FIE group has taken the initiative of proposing a system of compensation for the victims".*

In practice, the cartel consisted in ANSUL, SOMATI FIE and SICLI dividing up public procurement contracts among themselves in order to retain their historical customers by refraining from bidding for the contracts in question or by submitting "cover" bids (i.e. bids that are intentionally priced higher than the one to be submitted by the company supposed to be awarded the contract).

To sanction the infringement, in accordance with its established methodology, the BCA imposed a fine of 2.2 million euro on the SICLI group. The ANSUL/SOMATI FIE group was granted immunity from fines for being the first to report the facts to the BCA under the leniency programme. SICLI also cooperated with the BCA's investigation and was granted a 50% reduction in fine. In its decision, the BCA also took into account the ANSUL/SOMATI FIE group's undertaking to compensate its customers who were victims of the infringement, in accordance with predefined terms and conditions.

Finally, six individuals applied for and were granted immunity from prosecution.

The decision will be published shortly on the website of the Belgian Competition Authority.

Companies wishing to report their knowledge of or participation in a cartel, and potentially obtain immunity from fines or a reduction in the penalty incurred, are invited to contact the BCA Prosecutor General.

**For more information you may contact:**

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The Belgian Competition Authority (BCA) is an independent administrative authority that contributes to the definition and implementation of competition policy in Belgium. Concretely, the BCA pursues anti-competitive practices, such as cartels and abuses of a dominant position, and reviews the main merger operations. The BCA cooperates with the other competition authorities of the member states of the European Union and the European Commission within the European Competition Network (ECN)