



Ms. Margrethe Vestager
Competition Commissioner
European Commission
Brussels, Belgium
Via email

April 13, 2015

Re: Statement of Objections against Google

Dear Commissioner Vestager:

I am writing on behalf of Consumer Watchdog, a U.S. public interest group, to urge you to file a formal Statement of Objections against Google in the Commission's ongoing antitrust investigation of the Internet giant. Your predecessor's attempts at settlement negotiations produced three unacceptable proposals. Without a formal Statement of Objections to motivate Google, the company simply engages in lengthy settlement talks and continues its abusive anticompetitive behavior. If nothing else, a Statement of Objections will concentrate Google executives' minds and prompt serious negotiations. If the Internet giant fails to give an adequate response, the path is open to force changes and levy substantial fines.

Consumer welfare must be the ultimate test of any antitrust settlement. Consumer groups on both side of the Atlantic – BEUC and Consumer Watchdog – objected to all three previous settlement offers. They simply did not resolve the fundamental issue of search manipulation. The heart of the problem is simple. Google has developed a substantial conflict of interest. It no longer has an incentive to steer users to other sites, but rather favors its own services. It is becoming even more effective at this and has a greater incentive to engage in manipulation now that it is merging data collected across all its services. The only way to deal with this conflict is to remove it. Ideally, there needs to be a separation of Google's different services and assets. At a minimum any remedy must insist that Google use an objective, nondiscriminatory mechanism to rank and display all search results – including links to Google products.

Our nonprofit, nonpartisan public interest group receives no funding Google's competitors. Our interest in this case is only motivated by our concern for the welfare of consumers.

Three failed settlement proposals from Google during your predecessor's tenure demonstrate the futility of proceeding without a Statement of Objections. Consumer Watchdog calls on you to file a formal Statement of Objections and commence antitrust proceedings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Simpson".

John M. Simpson
Privacy Project Director

Cc: Ditte Juul-Jørgensen, Friedrich Wenzel Bulst, Claes Bengtsson, and Alexander Italianer