

# A converging competition agenda for the prosperity of Mexico and the United States





Comisión Federal de Competencia Económica

# **Presentation**

Through an announcement that surprised the world-wide competition community, on July 9th the United States Government published the Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy (Executive Order).<sup>1</sup>

Said Executive Order recognizes the benefits of competition by indicating that sustained economic prosperity requires an open and competitive economy. It underscores that competition generates more choices for small businesses to sell their products and allows them to obtain higher profits; opens new opportunities for entrepreneurs to experiment and innovate with new ideas which improve citizens' quality of life; and provides the general population with more and better purchase choices, by allowing access to higher-quality products and services at lower prices.

The text drew attention because the Government itself points out that the United States' economy has concentrated over the past decades and lack of competition has weakened some markets, denying citizens the aforementioned benefits. In order to revert this situation, it recognizes the need for an **integral competition policy**, whereby diverse government agencies (sectoral regulators) coordinate with competition authorities. According to the Executive Order, government agencies must identify and, according to each case, modify or eliminate regulations which pose unnecessary barriers to market entry or suffocate competition.

Similarly, Mexico's Federal Economic Competition Commission (COFECE) has noted that, to achieve competitive markets in Mexico, authorities in diverse areas of government must work together, as on many occasions a lack of competition derives not only from anticompetitive conducts by economic agents, but also from rules that favor concentration, protect incumbents' market share and/or enable breaching the competition law. For this reason, COFECE has analyzed and diagnosed diverse markets which are relevant for the national economy, and put forth recommendations which may be implemented by sectoral regulators to eliminate obstacles to the entry of new suppliers, so Mexican families and enterprises may enjoy the benefits of competition.

In the context of the U.S.-Mexico High-Level Economic Dialogue that will take place in the following days, and which considers the achievement of sustained economic prosperity as a topic in its agenda, COFECE publishes this document highlighting some of the markets it has analyzed and that coincide with those covered by President Biden's Executive Order. It also summarizes some of its recommendations to inject competition into the Mexican economy which, in many cases, appear to be similar to those put forth by the Executive Order.

Mexico City, September 7th, 2021

<sup>1.</sup> Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/07/09/executive-order-on-promoting-competition-in-the-american-economy/

# I. Freight Railway Transportation

Main messages of the Executive Order <sup>2</sup>	Main recommendations of COFECE
With the purpose of promoting competition in the rail industry and provide remedies to shippers, the Chair of the Surface Transportation Board shall work together with the rest of the Board to, among other issues, consi- der matters of competitive access in the processes of creation or modification of regulation, including bottle- neck rates.	<ul> <li>COFECE has highlighted that the railway network in Mexico has not grown in the last years and that it is fragmented, that is, concessionaires concentrate their activities in their own sections with limited connectivity and continuity to the sections from others. In part, this occurs due to certain regulatory obstacles that hinder the task of the regulator to establish new rights-of-way, or regulate tariffs in sections in which there is no competition and, therefore, impair the efficiency of the Mexican Railway Service.</li> <li>In this sense COFECE has recommended:</li> <li>Reconfiguring the railway network when the current concessions expire to avoid unbalances in the bargaining power between concessionaries and promote competition in the most important routes.</li> <li>Eliminating obstacles that do not allow the use of existing rights-of-way, as well as the creation of new ones. Specifically: i) establish a regulation that provides non-discriminatory access conditions to the networks of the different concessionaires, and ii) design a tariff regulation, on a case-by-case basis, that encourages interlineal traffic.</li> <li>Eliminating bottlenecks in the railway system by promoting interlineal services. In this regard, the following recommendations are made: i) establish a switching mechanism (<i>interswitching</i>) similar to that observed in the United States and Canada, ii) issue a methodology for the evaluation of maximum tariffs; and iii) specify that the regulator may regulate interlineal tariffs.</li> <li>Strengthen the institutional design of the Rail Transport Regulatory Agency (ARTF per its acronym in Spanish), mainly its information collection and sanction powers.</li> </ul>

 $\ensuremath{\mathbf{2}}$  . This column presents a synthesis from the content of the Executive Order

- Estudio de competencia en el servicio público de transporte ferroviario de carga [Competition study in the freight railway transportation public service] (2021). Available (in Spanish) here
- Proposals on economic competition to support the recovery of the Mexican economy (2020). Available here

# II. Regulatory Improvement

Main messages of the Executive Order	Main recommendations of COFECE
The White House Competition Council will coordinate, promote and advance in the implementation of the efforts of the federal government to address overcon- centration, monopolization and unfair competition or directly affecting the American economy, including those efforts to identify any potential legislative chan- ges necessary to promote the policies established in section 1 of the Order. (Section 1. Policy) <sup>3</sup> Also, the heads of all agencies will consider the use of their authority to promote the policies established in section 1 of the order, with special emphasis on the influence of their regulation, particularly, any regulation referring to licenses, about concentration and competi- tion in the industries under their jurisdictions.	COFECE has highlighted that when regulation unne- cessarily restricts the efficient functioning of markets, for example, by limiting entry or granting privileges to certain economic agents, it generates disruptions on price, supply, quality and availability, all to the detriment of the consumer. In recent years, COFECE has identified and proposed the removal of several regulatory obstacles to compe- tition present in the state regulations of key markets for the Mexican economy, such as gasolines and diesel, freight transportation and liquified petroleum gas. To facilitate the removal of these obstacles, COFECE has proposed that, through the National Commission for Regulatory Improvement (CONAMER per its acronym in Spanish), guidelines be issued for local governments to reform their state laws, at least the aforementioned markets where there is a consensus about the restric- tions and their effects. Thus, in 2020, COFECE urged CONAMER to notify this Commission (according to the terms of the General Law of Regulatory Improvement and the COFECE-CO- NAMER Agreement) with regards to all the regulatory Drafts that have an impact on competition and free market access, for their proper analysis.
	In addition, to avoid the imposition of serious obstacles to competition in the regulation, COFECE has proposed being granted with the power of exercising unconstitu- tionality actions against federal and local laws which go against the constitutional guarantee of free competi- tion and market access.

3. Section 1. Policy describes the general guidelines of the motivation and objectives of the measures outlined throughout the Executive Order. Said section establishes that it is a policy from the President Biden's Administration to enforce antitrust laws to fight excessive concentration in the industry, abuses of market power and the harmful effects of monopoly and monopsony, specially when these issues arise in labor markets, agricultural markets, internet platforms, healthcare markets (including the markets of insurance, hospitals and prescribed drugs), reparation markets and markets of the United States directly affected by the existence of foreign cartels.

Reference Documents	<ul> <li>Proposals on economic competition to support the recovery of the Mexican economy (2020). Available here</li> <li>Propuestas de Agenda Regulatoria Subnacional para el Autotransporte de</li> </ul>
Carga [Sub (2019) Availa Opinión sob importación [Opinion on and export	<i>Carga</i> [Subnational Regulatory Agenda Proposals for Freight Transportation] (2019) Available (in Spanish) here
	<ul> <li>Opinión sobre el Anteproyecto de Acuerdo que establece las mercancías cuya importación y exportación está sujeta a regulación de la Secretaría de Energía [Opinion on the Draft Agreement which establishes the goods whose import and export is subject to the regulation of the Ministry of Economy]. (2020) Avai- lable (in Spanish) here</li> </ul>
	• Economic Competition: A platform for growth 2018-2024. Available here

# **III. Generic drugs**

- Proposals on economic competition to support the recovery of the Mexican economy (2020). Available here
- Study on free market and competition in the expired patent drug markets in Mexico (2017). Available here

# **IV. Public procurement**

Agencies can influence the competition conditions through the exercise of their authority or through their procurement procedures. The heads of all agencies will consider the use of their authority to promote the policies established in section 1 of the order, with special attention in, among others, their acquisition processes or other expenses with the purpose of improving competitiveness of small compa- nies and those with fair labor practices. Narrow down the criteria which allow exceptions to public tenders. Narrow down the criteria which allow exceptions to public tenders. Require for participants to declare for what and to whom they plan to subcontract, since COFECE has sanctioned collusion cases through this figure: (when the company that wins subcontracts parts of		
<ul> <li>through the exercise of their authority or through their procurement procedures.</li> <li>The heads of all agencies will consider the use of their authority to promote the policies established in section 1 of the order, with special attention in, among others, their acquisition processes or other expenses with the purpose of improving competitiveness of small companies.</li> <li>through tenders can be a recovery mechanism for companies that do not find space to sell in private markets; but this can only be materialized if purchases are truly open and competed, and allow the participation of a greater number of companies on equal conditions.</li> <li>Thus, COFECE has recommended modifying the Procurement Law to:</li> <li>Narrow down the criteria which allow exceptions to public tenders.</li> <li>Facilitate the realization of international tenders, especially in concentrated markets.</li> <li>Disqualify for up to five years suppliers sanctioned by COFECE for collusion, to effectively increase the cost for these companies of entering into such agreements.</li> <li>Require for participants to declare for what and to whom they plan to subcontract, since COFECE has sanctioned collusion cases through this figure: (when the company that wins subcontracts parts of</li> </ul>	Main messages of the Executive Order	Main recommendations of COFECE
<ul> <li>Oblige convenors to declare to which economic interest group they belong to avoid simulated competition between companies of a same group.</li> </ul>	through the exercise of their authority or through their procurement procedures. The heads of all agencies will consider the use of their authority to promote the policies established in section 1 of the order, with special attention in, among others, their acquisition processes or other expenses with the purpose of improving competitiveness of small compa-	<ul> <li>through tenders can be a recovery mechanism for companies that do not find space to sell in private markets; but this can only be materialized if purchases are truly open and competed, and allow the participation of a greater number of companies on equal conditions. Thus, COFECE has recommended modifying the Procurement Law to:</li> <li>Narrow down the criteria which allow exceptions to public tenders.</li> <li>Facilitate the realization of international tenders, especially in concentrated markets.</li> <li>Disqualify for up to five years suppliers sanctioned by COFECE for collusion, to effectively increase the cost for these companies of entering into such agreements.</li> <li>Require for participants to declare for what and to whom they plan to subcontract, since COFECE has sanctioned collusion cases through this figure: (when the company that wins subcontracts parts of its contract to other members of the cartel).</li> <li>Oblige convenors to declare to which economic interest group they belong to avoid simulated</li> </ul>

Reference
Documents

- Agenda de competencia para un ejercicio íntegro de las Contrataciones Públicas [Competition Agenda for a comprehensive exercise of Public Procurement]. (2018). Available (in Spanish) here
- Proposals on economic competition to support the recovery of the Mexican economy (2020). Available here
- Proyecto de Ley General de Adquisiciones, Arrendamientos y Servicios del Sector Público [Draft General Law of Acquisitions, Leases and Services of the Public Sector] (2020). Available (in Spanish) here

# V. Airport services

Main messages of the Executive Order	Main recommendations of COFECE
To provide consumers with more flight options at better prices and with a better service, and to broaden the opportunities of competition and entry into the market as the industry evolves, the Secretary of Transportation shall, among others, consider measures to support the develop- ment of airports and increase the capacity and improve the management of airports, the access to boarding gates, the implementation of airport competition plans in conformity with 49 U.S.C 47106(f) and <i>slots</i> administration.	<ul> <li>COFECE has highlighted the importance of <i>slot</i> allocation criteria in airports that operate in saturation conditions to promote competition in passenger air transportation. In this regard, it has recommended:</li> <li>Prohibiting official and private aviation operations in saturated airports.</li> <li>Ensuring the effective compliance with the responsibilities of the Airport Administrator in matters of transparency, management certainty and accountability.</li> <li>Granting technical, operative and financial independence to the schedule coordinator.</li> <li>Modifying the Airports Law Bylaw and the bases of the Ministry of Communications and Transportation (SCT per its acronym in Spanish) for the allocation and removal of <i>slots</i> to prioritize their effective use.</li> <li>Assessing the possibility of establishing stricter rules for the allocation, removal and unduly use of <i>slots</i>.</li> <li>Establishing tariffs for airport services proportionally greater than the operations with low-seating capacity aircrafts in the Income Law.</li> <li>It also has pointed out some regulatory barriers that restrict competition in the taxi service from airports (which is part of the total cost of transportation paid by passengers) and make it more expensive. In this regard it has recommended that:</li> <li>The SCT grants permits for federal passenger transportation from federal airports to anyone that meets the requirements provided by the Law of Federal Roads, Bridges and Transportation, without subjecting the decision to the opinion of the airport administrators.</li> <li>Regulation oversees only safety and quality objectives in the service, without artificially limiting the supply or including requirements that could unjustifiably exclude potential competitors.</li> </ul>

### • Análisis de caso: Insumo esencial en el mercado de servicios de transporte Reference aéreo [Case analysis: Essential input in the air transportation market]. (2017). Available (in Spanish) here **Documents** • Comentarios sobre las "Bases Generales para la Asignación de Horarios de Aterrizaje y Despegue en Aeropuertos en Condiciones de Saturación" [Comments to the "General Bases for the Allocation of Landing and Take-Off Schedules in Airports under Saturation Conditions] (2017). Available (in Spanish) here • Opinión sobre la normativa aplicable al servicio de acceso a la zona federal y estacionamiento para la prestación del servicio público de autotransporte federal de pasajeros en su modalidad de taxi, con rigen en los aeropuertos nacionales [Opinion on the regulation aplicable to the service of access to the federal zone and parking for the rendering of the public service of federal passenger transportation in its modality of taxi, with origin in national airports]. (2016). Available (in Spanish) here

VI. Financial services	
Main messages of the Executive Order	Main recommendations of COFECE
In the financial services sector, consumers pay high and, often, hidden fees due to the consolidation of the industry. The heads of all agencies will consider the use of their authorities to promote the policies established in section 1 of the Order, with special emphasis on, among others, ensuring that Americans have choices among financial institutions and to guard against excessive market power, the Attorney General, in consultation with the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corpora- tion, and the Comptroller of the Currency, is urged to review current practices and adopt a plan, in no more than 180 days after the issuance of this order, to revi- talize merger oversight under the Bank Merger Act and the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956.	<ul> <li>COFECE has also pointed out that the financial system in Mexico has a high concentration of suppliers in some products and services, as well as a high bank profitability, in part anchored to charging of fees, and that surpasses that observed in countries with similar income levels. Thus, it has made different recommendations, among which the following stand out: <ul> <li>That the Senate requires the Bank of Mexico a study for each one of the fees charged to users with the objective of classify them in two groups: 1) those where costs are directly related to the product or service and are easily identifiable (for example, card replacement fees); 2) those relevant for the functioning of the financial system and whose regulation could generate counterproductive or unforeseeable effects (for example, fees for the use of an ATM). For those cases in which there is a justification to establish a maximum cap, determine specific regulatory measures for each problem avoiding a distortion to competition and free market access.</li> <li>Regulate exchange fees for credit and debit cards with the purpose of optimizing the use of this means of payment and its coverage.</li> <li>On fees for the use of ATMs: (i) establish a mutual non-collection fee scheme up to a certain level of imbalance between banks (from this threshold banks could charge fees); (ii) establish a transition scheme that allows to reach competition in the charges for the use of ATMs by issuing banks; and (iv) maintain the current level of transparency in the charging of fees (notice to the cardholder).</li> </ul> It has also highlighted that the government has information about the credit behavior of natural and legal persons, specially those that are outside the financial system, which is not exploited to generate more competition and inclusion in this market. Thus, it recommended to create a public credit bureau to which all those interested have access, with information regarding the payment of utilities such as electricity, water, social housi</li></ul>

Main messages of the Executive Order	Main recommendations of COFECE
	Finally, it has pointed out that the entry into the market of financial technology institutions (FTI) is a source of competitive pressure on the traditional banking sector, incentivizes the adoption of more efficient technolo- gies throughout the financial system and represents an opportunity to encourage financial inclusion. To facili- tate the entry of these companies into the market it is still necessary to ensure that the secondary regulation does not impose regulatory obstacles to competition. In this regard, it is necessary to:
	• Not restrict the access to foreign storage and infor- mation processing services (cloud computing).
	<ul> <li>Guarantee IT solutions developers (APIs) open and non-discriminatory access to the necessary inputs such as information of the customer's transactio- nal data or access to the history of their deposit accounts (open banking); and</li> </ul>
	Eliminate excessive requirements for FTIs to provide services through commission agents.

Reference	<ul> <li>Proposals on economic competition to support the recovery of the Mexican economy (2020). Available here</li> <li>OPN 011 2018, animién cabra la "Inicipitiva can Provente de Decrete par el que ca</li> </ul>
Documents	<ul> <li>OPN-011-2018, opinión sobre la "Iniciativa con Proyecto de Decreto por el que se adicionan diversas disposiciones de la Ley para la Transparencia y el Ordena- miento de Servicios Financieros y de la Ley de Instituciones de Crédito en materia de comisiones bancarias" [Opinion on the "Initiative with a Draft Decree by which several provisions of the Law for the Transparency and the Organization of the Financial Services and the Law of the Credit Institutions in matters of bank fees are added". (2018) Available (in Spanish) here</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>OPN-007-2017, opinión sobre la iniciativa de "Decreto por el que se expide la Ley para Regular Instituciones de Tecnología Financiera" [Opinion to the initiative of the Decree by which the Law to Regulate Financial Technologies is issued"] (2017) Available (in Spanish) here</li> </ul>
	• Research and recommendations on competition conditions in the financial sector and its markets (2014) Available here

# **VII. Professional services**

Main messages of the Executive Order	Main recommendations of COFECE
The consolidation has increased the power of corporate employers, which has made it harder for workers to negotiate higher wages and better working conditions. Big powerful companies force their workers to sign non-compete agreements that restrict their ability to change jobs. While occupational licenses are critical to increasing wages of workers and specially those of color, some too restrictive occupational licenses requi- rements could impede the ability of workers to find a job and move between states. The heads of all agencies will consider the use of their authority to promote the policies established in section 1 of the order, with special emphasis on, among others, unfair restrictions in the concession of professional licenses.	<ul> <li>COFECE has also pointed out some regulatory restrictions that make it more difficult for professionals to work in different federative entities. In this regard it has recommended:</li> <li>Eliminating limits to the activities that foreign professionals or professionals with studies abroad may undertake.</li> <li>Eliminating self-regulation tariff and fees schemes, as well as access authorization to the own members of a guild.</li> <li>Particularly, eliminating regulatory obstacles to the provision of notarial services could encourage competition in different markets by favoring legal certainty in certain acts. This issue has also caught the attention of other countries such as Spain, Peru and Chile. In this regard, COFECE has recommended, among others:</li> <li>Eliminating limits on the number of notaries.</li> <li>Eliminating regional restrictions to provide the service.</li> <li>Reducing discretion in the publication of vacancies.</li> </ul>

- Miscelánea de obstáculos regulatorios a la competencia, análisis de la normativa estatal [Compilation of regulatory obstacles to competition, analysis of state regulations] (2016) Available (in Spanish) here
- OPN-008-2018, Opinión sobre la iniciativa con proyecto de decreto que crea la Ley de Notariado para el Estado de Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave [Opinion to the initiative with a draft decree by which the Notary Law of the State of Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave is issued] (2018). Available (in Spanish) here

# VIII. Maneuvering services in ports Main messages of the Executive Order Main recommendations of COFECE The world industry of container shipping has consolidated in a small number of dominant foreign-owned alliances and lines, which can harm American exporters. Just like the Executive Order recognizes the importance of ports as logistical platforms whose efficiency impacts the competitiveness of exports, COFECE has pointed out for the Mexican case that ports are nodes

dated in a small humber of dominant foreign-owned alliances and lines, which can harm American exporters.	impacts the competitiveness of exports, COFECE has pointed out for the Mexican case that ports are nodes in which the networks of shipping, rail and highway transport converge to connect the production or import centers with those of consumption. It has also mentio- ned that there is little competition in the supply of maneuvering services within ports, due in part to a bad regulatory design and its enforcement. While the Ports Law provides that the SCT can establish the bases for tariff regulation when there is no competition, this does not always happen. Some examples are:
	• In the port of Topolobampo, there is only one specia- lized supplier in the maneuvering of bulk agricultu- ral products, and the tender to award a contract for a second facility specialized in this type of cargo has been postponed indefinitely. Also, the tariff of its services is not regulated.
	• In the port of Veracruz, the assignee specialized in containers has a market share of 85%, which could increase when its new terminal begins operations in the expansion area of this port.
	• In the port of Lázaro Cárdenas a multipurpose terminal is prevented from participating in the embarking and disembarking of automobiles, which causes that the specialized operator in vehicles concentrates 100% of the market, without the tariff of this service being regulated.
	• In the port of Progreso there is also a sole assignee for the maneuvering of bulk agricultural products, and also it provides the non-specialized service to these products at the dock located in the common use areas (known as multiple use terminal), without the tariff for this service being regulated.
	For this reason, COFECE proposed to modify the Ports Law to, among other aspects, incorporate the obligation to implement tariff regulation when there is a resolution on the absence of competition conditions in a certain port; as well as to increase the power of the Integral Port Administration to provide the services only when there are no other service providers.

- Opinión para promover la aplicación de principios de competencia y libre concurrencia en la proveeduría de servicios de maniobras portuarias [Opinion to promote the application of competition and free market access principles to the provision of port maneuvering services] (2019). Available (in Spanish) here
- Proposals on economic competition to support the recovery of the Mexican economy (2020). Available here

# IX. Relation between small businesses and sales platforms

Main messages of the Executive Order	Main recommendations of COFECE
Too many small companies across the economy depend on the dominant internet platforms and a few online marketplaces for their survival. To improve access of farmers and smaller food processors to retail markets, in no longer than 300 days after of this order, in consultation with the Chair of the FTC, present a report to the Chair of the White House Competition Council, about the effect of the concentration on the retail market and the practices of retailers in the competition conditions of food industries, including any practice that could violate the Federal Trade Commission Act, the Robinson-Pat- man Act (Public Law 74-692, 49 Stat. 1526, 15 U.S.C. 13 et seq.), or other relevant laws, and on grants, loans and other support that could improve access to the retail markets by local and regional food companies.	COFECE has pointed out that in the retail trade of foods and beverages in Mexico, the large commercial chains have a certain degree of purchasing power at least vis-à- vis small suppliers in some industries. This bargaining power is reflected in the unilateral imposition of discounts to the payments of suppliers in accordance with the payment date of their invoices (the sooner the store pays, the greater discount granted to the supplier), as well as the application of discounts for the use of their logistical network and the so called "porting" (porteo) – service consisting of the delivery of goods in a distribution center different to the one which a store is aligned to – in case of being required. Bargaining power can also appear in e-commerce, given the double role of digital platforms as suppliers and competitors, as well as the network effects of their business model, which sometimes hinder the entry of competitors. With the purpose of mitigating asymmetry in the bargai- ning power between suppliers and commercial chains, COFECE recommended an effective application of the <i>Code of Competitive Commercial Practices</i> among the small and medium companies, which was signed by suppliers and self-service chains in 2009 to solve conflicts among them by regulating certain business practices. Also, said Code would have to be expanded so that retail chains do not charge their suppliers for situations attri- butable to the store, loss of articles after the delivery and mistakes in the sales forecasts.

- Estudio de Competencia en el canal moderno de comercio al menudeo de alimentos y bebidas [Competition Study in the modern channel of retail commerce of foods and beverages] (2020) Available (in Spanish) here
- Proposals on economic competition to support the recovery of the Mexican economy (2020). Available here

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