

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Plaintiff,

v.

AHMET H. OKUMUS

Defendant.

Civil Action No.

COMPETITIVE IMPACT STATEMENT

The United States, pursuant to the Antitrust Procedures and Penalties Act (“APPA”), 15 U.S.C. § 16(b)-(h), files this Competitive Impact Statement to set forth the information necessary to enable the Court and the public to evaluate the proposed Final Judgment that would terminate this civil antitrust proceeding.

I. NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THIS PROCEEDING

On January 17, 2017, the United States filed a Complaint against Defendant Ahmet H. Okumus (“Okumus”), related to Okumus’s acquisition of voting securities of Web.com Group, Inc. (“Web.com”) in June 2016. The Complaint alleges that Okumus violated Section 7A of the Clayton Act, 15 U.S.C. § 18a, commonly known as the Hart-Scott-Rodino Antitrust Improvements Act of 1976 (the “HSR Act”). The HSR Act provides that “no person shall acquire, directly or indirectly, any voting securities of any person” exceeding certain thresholds until that person has filed pre-acquisition notification and report forms with the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission (collectively, the “federal antitrust agencies” or “agencies”) and the post-filing waiting period has expired. 15 U.S.C. § 18a(a). A key purpose of

the notification and waiting period is to protect consumers and competition from potentially anticompetitive transactions by providing the agencies an opportunity to conduct an antitrust review of proposed transactions before they are consummated.

The Complaint alleges that Okumus acquired voting securities of Web.com in excess of then-applicable statutory thresholds without making the required pre-acquisition HSR filings with the agencies and without observing the waiting period, and that Okumus and Web.com met the applicable statutory size of person thresholds.

At the same time the Complaint was filed in the present action, the United States also filed a Stipulation and proposed Final Judgment that eliminates the need for a trial in this case. The proposed Final Judgment is designed to deter Okumus' HSR Act violations. Under the proposed Final Judgment, Okumus must pay a civil penalty to the United States in the amount of \$180,000.

The United States and the Defendant have stipulated that the proposed Final Judgment may be entered after compliance with the APPA, unless the United States first withdraws its consent. Entry of the proposed Final Judgment would terminate this case, except that the Court would retain jurisdiction to construe, modify, or enforce the provisions of the proposed Final Judgment and punish violations thereof.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENTS GIVING RISE TO THE ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF THE ANTITRUST LAWS

Okumus is an investor with his principal office and place of business in New York City. At all times relevant to the Complaint, Okumus had sales or assets in excess of \$156.3 million. At all times relevant to the Complaint, Web.com, a Delaware corporation headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida, had sales or assets in excess of \$15.6 million.

On November 21, 2014, Okumus filed under the HSR Act to acquire voting securities of Web.com. Okumus filed at the \$50 million threshold, as adjusted. After the waiting period expired, Okumus was permitted under the HSR Act to acquire additional voting securities of Web.com for five years without making a new HSR filing so long as his holdings did not exceed the \$100 million threshold, as adjusted. On June 27, 2016, Okumus acquired additional voting securities of Web.com. As a result of this acquisition, Okumus held voting securities of Web.com valued at approximately \$156.6 million, which was in excess of \$156.3 million, the as adjusted \$100 million threshold in effect at the time. Although he was required to do so under the HSR Act, Okumus failed to make an HSR filing and observe the statutory waiting period before consummating the June 27, 2016 acquisition.

On July 14, 2016, Okumus sold voting securities of Web.com. As a result of this sale, he no longer held voting securities valued in excess of \$156.3 million, and was no longer in violation of the HSR Act.

The Complaint further alleges that Okumus's June 2016 HSR Act violation was not the first time Okumus had failed to observe the HSR Act's notification and waiting period requirements. On September 11, 2014, Okumus acquired voting securities of Web.com. As a result of this acquisition, Okumus held approximately 13.5 percent of the voting securities of Web.com. Okumus did not file under the HSR Act prior to making this acquisition, relying on the exemption for acquisitions made solely for the purpose of investment. *See* 15 U.S.C. § 18a(c)(9). However, the exemption is limited to acquisitions that result in holdings that do not exceed ten percent of the voting securities of the issuer; acquisitions that result in holding in excess of ten percent require an HSR filing regardless of the purpose of the acquisition. On November 21, 2014, Okumus made a corrective HSR filing for the September 11, 2014

acquisition, and explained in a letter accompanying the corrective filing that his failure to file was inadvertent. On December 31, 2014, the Premerger Notification Office of the Federal Trade Commission notified Okumus by letter that it would not recommend a civil penalty for the violation, but advised Okumus that he was “accountable for instituting an effective program to ensure full compliance with the Act’s requirements.”

III. EXPLANATION OF THE PROPOSED FINAL JUDGMENT

The proposed Final Judgment imposes a \$180,000 civil penalty designed to deter the Defendant and others from violating the HSR Act. The United States adjusted the penalty downward from the maximum permitted under the HSR Act because the violation was inadvertent, the Defendant promptly corrected the violation after discovery by selling voting securities, and the Defendant is willing to resolve the matter by consent decree and avoid prolonged investigation and litigation. The relief will have a beneficial effect on competition because the agencies will be properly notified of future acquisitions, in accordance with the law. At the same time, the penalty will not have any adverse effect on competition.

IV. REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO POTENTIAL PRIVATE LITIGANTS

There is no private antitrust action for HSR Act violations; therefore, entry of the proposed Final Judgment will neither impair nor assist the bringing of any private antitrust action.

V. PROCEDURES AVAILABLE FOR MODIFICATION OF THE PROPOSED FINAL JUDGMENT

The United States and the Defendant have stipulated that the proposed Final Judgment may be entered by this Court after compliance with the provisions of the APPA, provided that the United States has not withdrawn its consent. The APPA conditions entry of the decree upon this Court’s determination that the proposed Final Judgment is in the public interest.

The APPA provides a period of at least sixty (60) days preceding the effective date of the proposed Final Judgment within which any person may submit to the United States written comments regarding the proposed Final Judgment. Any person who wishes to comment should do so within sixty (60) days of the date of publication of this Competitive Impact Statement in the *Federal Register*, or the last date of publication in a newspaper of the summary of this Competitive Impact Statement, whichever is later. All comments received during this period will be considered by the United States, which remains free to withdraw its consent to the proposed Final Judgment at any time prior to entry. The comments and the response of the United States will be filed with this Court. In addition, comments will be posted on the U.S. Department of Justice, Antitrust Division's internet website and, under certain circumstances, published in the *Federal Register*. Written comments should be submitted to:

Daniel P. Ducore
Special Attorney, United States
c/o Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
CC-8416
Washington, DC 20580
Email: dducore@ftc.gov

The proposed Final Judgment provides that this Court retains jurisdiction over this action, and the parties may apply to this Court for any order necessary or appropriate for the modification, interpretation, or enforcement of the Final Judgment.

VI. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED FINAL JUDGMENT

As an alternative to the proposed Final Judgment, the United States considered pursuing a full trial on the merits against the Defendant. The United States is satisfied, however, that the proposed relief is an appropriate remedy in this matter. Given the facts of this case, including the Defendant's self-reporting of the violation and willingness to promptly settle this matter, the

United States is satisfied that the proposed civil penalty is sufficient to address the violation alleged in the Complaint and to deter violations by similarly situated entities in the future, without the time, expense, and uncertainty of a full trial on the merits.

VII. STANDARD OF REVIEW UNDER THE APPA FOR THE PROPOSED FINAL JUDGMENT

The APPA requires proposed consent judgments in antitrust cases brought by the United States be subject to a sixty (60) day comment period, after which the court shall determine whether entry of the proposed Final Judgment is “in the public interest.” 15 U.S.C. § 16(e)(1). In making that determination, the court, in accordance with the statute as amended in 2004, is required to consider:

(A) the competitive impact of such judgment, including termination of alleged violations, provisions for enforcement and modification, duration of relief sought, anticipated effects of alternative remedies actually considered, whether its terms are ambiguous, and any other competitive considerations bearing upon the adequacy of such judgment that the court deems necessary to a determination of whether the consent judgment is in the public interest; and

(B) the impact of entry of such judgment upon competition in the relevant market or markets, upon the public generally and individuals alleging specific injury from the violations set forth in the complaint including consideration of the public benefit, if any, to be derived from a determination of the issues at trial.

Id. § 16(e)(1)(A) & (B). In considering these statutory factors, the court’s inquiry is necessarily a limited one, as the government is entitled to “broad discretion to settle with the defendant within the reaches of the public interest.” *United States v. Microsoft Corp.*, 56 F.3d 1448, 1461 (D.C. Cir. 1995); *see generally United States v. SBC Commc’ns, Inc.*, 489 F. Supp. 2d 1 (D.D.C. 2007) (assessing public interest standard under the Tunney Act); *United States v. U.S. Airways Group, Inc.*, 38 F. Supp. 3d 69, 75 (D.D.C. 2014) (noting that the court’s “inquiry is limited” because the government has “broad discretion” to determine the adequacy of the relief secured

through a settlement); *United States v. InBev N.V./S.A.*, No. 08-1965 (JR), 2009-2 Trade Cas. (CCH) ¶ 76,736, 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 84787, at *3 (D.D.C. Aug. 11, 2009) (noting that the court’s review of a consent judgment is limited and only inquires “into whether the government’s determination that the proposed remedies will cure the antitrust violations alleged in the complaint was reasonable, and whether the mechanism to enforce the final judgment are clear and manageable.”).¹

As the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit has held, a court conducting an inquiry under the APPA may consider, among other things, the relationship between the remedy secured and the specific allegations set forth in the government’s complaint, whether the decree is sufficiently clear, whether enforcement mechanisms are sufficient, and whether the decree may positively harm third parties. *See Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1458-62. With respect to the adequacy of the relief secured by the decree, a court may not “engage in an unrestricted evaluation of what relief would best serve the public.” *United States v. BNS, Inc.*, 858 F.2d 456, 462 (9th Cir. 1988) (quoting *United States v. Bechtel Corp.*, 648 F.2d 660, 666 (9th Cir. 1981)); *see also Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1460-62; *United States v. Alcoa, Inc.*, 152 F. Supp. 2d 37, 40 (D.D.C. 2001); *InBev*, 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 84787, at *3. Courts have held that:

[t]he balancing of competing social and political interests affected by a proposed antitrust consent decree must be left, in the first instance, to the discretion of the Attorney General. The court’s role in protecting the public interest is one of insuring that the government has not breached its duty to the public in consenting to the decree. The court is required to determine not whether a particular decree is the one that will best serve society, but whether the settlement is “*within the reaches of the public interest.*” More elaborate requirements might undermine the effectiveness of antitrust enforcement by consent decree.

¹ The 2004 amendments substituted “shall” for “may” in directing relevant factors for court to consider and amended the list of factors to focus on competitive considerations and to address potentially ambiguous judgment terms. *Compare* 15 U.S.C. § 16(e) (2004), *with* 15 U.S.C. § 16(e)(1) (2006); *see also SBC Commc’ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 11 (concluding that the 2004 amendments “effected minimal changes” to Tunney Act review).

Bechtel, 648 F.2d at 666 (emphasis added) (citations omitted).² In determining whether a proposed settlement is in the public interest, a district court “must accord deference to the government’s predictions about the efficacy of its remedies, and may not require that the remedies perfectly match the alleged violations.” *SBC Commc’ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 17; *see also U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 75 (noting that a court should not reject the proposed remedies because it believes others are preferable); *Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1461 (noting the need for courts to be “deferential to the government’s predictions as to the effect of the proposed remedies”); *United States v. Archer-Daniels-Midland Co.*, 272 F. Supp. 2d 1, 6 (D.D.C. 2003) (noting that the court should grant due respect to the government’s prediction as to the effect of proposed remedies, its perception of the market structure, and its views of the nature of the case).

Courts have greater flexibility in approving proposed consent decrees than in crafting their own decrees following a finding of liability in a litigated matter. “[A] proposed decree must be approved even if it falls short of the remedy the court would impose on its own, as long as it falls within the range of acceptability or is ‘within the reaches of public interest.’” *United States v. Am. Tel. & Tel. Co.*, 552 F. Supp. 131, 151 (D.D.C. 1982) (citations omitted) (quoting *United States v. Gillette Co.*, 406 F. Supp. 713, 716 (D. Mass. 1975)), *aff’d sub nom., Maryland v. United States*, 460 U.S. 1001 (1983); *see also U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 76 (noting that room must be made for the government to grant concessions in the negotiation process for settlements (citing *Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1461)); *United States v. Alcan Aluminum Ltd.*, 605 F. Supp. 619, 622 (W.D. Ky. 1985) (approving the consent decree even though the court would

² *Cf. BNS*, 858 F.2d at 464 (holding that the court’s “ultimate authority under the [APPA] is limited to approving or disapproving the consent decree”); *United States v. Gillette Co.*, 406 F. Supp. 713, 716 (D. Mass. 1975) (noting that, in this way, the court is constrained to “look at the overall picture not hypercritically, nor with a microscope, but with an artist’s reducing glass”). *See generally Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1461 (discussing whether “the remedies [obtained in the decree are] so inconsonant with the allegations charged as to fall outside of the ‘reaches of the public interest’”).

have imposed a greater remedy). To meet this standard, the United States “need only provide a factual basis for concluding that the settlements are reasonably adequate remedies for the alleged harms.” *SBC Commc’ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 17.

Moreover, the court’s role under the APPA is limited to reviewing the remedy in relationship to the violations that the United States has alleged in its Complaint, and does not authorize the court to “construct [its] own hypothetical case and then evaluate the decree against that case.” *Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1459; *see also U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 75 (noting that the court must simply determine whether there is a factual foundation for the government’s decisions such that its conclusions regarding the proposed settlements are reasonable); *InBev*, 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 84787, at *20 (concluding that “the ‘public interest’ is not to be measured by comparing the violations alleged in the complaint against those the court believes could have, or even should have, been alleged”). Because the “court’s authority to review the decree depends entirely on the government’s exercising its prosecutorial discretion by bringing a case in the first place,” it follows that “the court is only authorized to review the decree itself,” and not to “effectively redraft the complaint” to inquire into other matters that the United States did not pursue. *Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1459-60. As this Court confirmed in *SBC Communications*, courts “cannot look beyond the complaint in making the public interest determination unless the complaint is drafted so narrowly as to make a mockery of judicial power.” 489 F. Supp. 2d at 15.

In its 2004 amendments, Congress made clear its intent to preserve the practical benefits of utilizing consent decrees in antitrust enforcement, adding the unambiguous instruction that “[n]othing in this section shall be construed to require the court to conduct an evidentiary hearing or to require the court to permit anyone to intervene.” 15 U.S.C. § 16(e)(2); *see also U.S.*

Airways, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 76 (indicating that a court is not required to hold an evidentiary hearing or to permit intervenors as part of its review under the Tunney Act). This language codified what Congress intended when it enacted the Tunney Act in 1974, as the author of this legislation, Senator Tunney, explained: “The court is nowhere compelled to go to trial or to engage in extended proceedings which might have the effect of vitiating the benefits of prompt and less costly settlement through the consent decree process.” 119 Cong. Rec. 24,598 (1973) (statement of Sen. Tunney). Rather, the procedure for the public interest determination is left to the discretion of the court, with the recognition that the court’s “scope of review remains sharply proscribed by precedent and the nature of Tunney Act proceedings.” *SBC Commc’ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 11.³ A court can make its public interest determination based on the competitive impact statement and response to public comments alone. *U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 76.

³ See also *United States v. Enova Corp.*, 107 F. Supp. 2d 10, 17 (D.D.C. 2000) (noting that the “Tunney Act expressly allows the court to make its public interest determination on the basis of the competitive impact statement and response to comments alone”); *United States v. Mid-Am. Dairymen, Inc.*, No. 73-CV-681-W-1, 1977-1 Trade Cas. (CCH) ¶ 61,508, at 71,980, *22 (W.D. Mo. 1977) (“Absent a showing of corrupt failure of the government to discharge its duty, the Court, in making its public interest finding, should . . . carefully consider the explanations of the government in the competitive impact statement and its responses to comments in order to determine whether those explanations are reasonable under the circumstances.”); S. Rep. No. 93-298, at 6 (1973) (“Where the public interest can be meaningfully evaluated simply on the basis of briefs and oral arguments, that is the approach that should be utilized.”).

VIII. DETERMINATIVE DOCUMENTS

There are no determinative materials or documents within the meaning of the APPA that were considered by the United States in formulating the proposed Final Judgment.

Date: January 17, 2017

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Kenneth A. Libby
Kenneth A. Libby
Special Attorney
U.S. Department of Justice
Antitrust Division
c/o Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580
Phone: (202) 326-2694
Email: klibby@ftc.gov