

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA BELENYI

by **Rachel Bull**

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GCR talks to Andrea Belenyi, secretary general at Hungary's Competition Authority



Andrea Belenyi talks to GCR

After graduating from law school at Szeged University, I started working in the Ministry of Finance as a junior lawyer.

Having worked there for just over a year I heard that the president of the Gazdasági Versenyhivatal (GVH, the Hungarian Competition Authority) was looking for someone to head the presidential secretariat. I decided to apply. At university I had studied competition law and the former chairman of the GVH's competition council had been my lecturer. I also had the chance to spend a term at Lund University in Sweden where I could deepen my knowledge in this field. After heading the presidential secretariat for four years I became the secretary general, the chief of staff of the GVH.

Each day is unique as this job has so many different elements.

But there are some typical features to my working days. As the chief of staff, it is my job to prepare strategically important decisions for the institution building in the GVH. I also have many operational tasks, which are time consuming, but not so visible. It is my job to handle human resources and PR matters.

There is another part of my work that I enjoy very much. In 2005 we established a joint training institution with the OECD: the Regional Centre for Competition in Budapest. Then in 2006 we created another special institution, for developing

and promoting competition culture in Hungary. This means that sometimes I start my day with an introductory presentation about the GVH to the participants of a seminar at our regional centre.

Otherwise, I attend management meetings or I compose articles for newspapers, in which I try to maintain the prestige of the GVH. At the end of the day I usually meet my colleagues to discuss relevant issues. During the day I read the internal documents or attend other meetings or have phone conversations with colleagues or people from other Hungarian institutions and I organise internal events for our staff.

In the past few years we have published governing principles for both antitrust and consumer protection cases and for our advocacy work. With all these principles we have managed to strengthen the operation of the GVH. Transparent, coherent and measured operation is of great value to the stakeholders, especially for the business community. We have high expectations of staff, not only in their daily work but also in their professional development, and as I see to it they meet these expectations.

A few years ago we realised that the GVH needed a fresh eye to objectively analyse the institution. I became the leader of the project and worked a lot on improving the internal communication, processes and operation of the GVH,

as well as on developing the managerial skills of our middle managers. We involved a team of external experts and they outlined the directions. After three years of work I can say that we have achieved some good results.

It would be really valuable if we could keep our young, talented and ambitious colleagues at the GVH for more than 10 years. We often hire young new graduates but after six or seven years they leave us for another job, mainly in the business sector. That is why it is so important to develop an HR career programme, to help solve this matter. It is also important to hire experienced people from the business sector too, as their knowledge could also be useful in our work.

We also face challenges in the cartel field. We have had a leniency programme since 2003 but we have had less leniency applications than we expected. We have been working on this issue for a long time, but we have not found a way to improve the tools we use or what we should introduce to be more effective in this field.

It's really important to build closer and stronger contacts with our stakeholders. By that I mean not only the governmental and parliamentary decision makers but also the business society. I think it would make it much easier to avoid some misunderstandings and to explain some actions of the GVH. Our advocacy work could also be much more effective.

In an environment where both producers and consumers are sceptical about the role of competition it is not that easy to build an institution such as our Competition Culture Centre. After more than four years developing competition culture I can say that we have had a lot of success in convincing others about the advantages of competition. We have published international handbooks in Hungarian and leaflets about our goals and activities. We've organised events for people in academia, for consumers and for the business community. And we've financially supported libraries of different Hungarian universities, which has also been a huge challenge for us. As I see it, there are more and more institutions that are interested in our activities and conduct research to a high standard. For this kind of activity, we did not find any examples from other jurisdictions that could be used as a model for us. But this gave us the chance to introduce our own innovations to the field. The regional centre is an innovation, too and I hope that it can be a model for other OECD regional centres.

If I had a wish I would ask for a more competition-friendly environment. This would make our advocacy activities easier. When we offer a more competitive solution for a certain market it would be useful if decision-makers did not approach our proposal from an opposing point of view. They should think about our proposals.

There are times when I need to work with my counterparts in other competition authorities. This part of my job is related more to the development of competition culture. The chief of staff position is more of an internal role but I certainly need to consider the experiences of others too. When I attend a meeting or an event I usually talk to people from other competition authorities and I often get useful advice. For example, the International Competition Network agency effectiveness workshop in London was a good opportunity for me to gather information about other people's experience in this field. Last year at the regional centre we introduced a so-called outside seminar, where we organise a tailor-made event in one of our target countries. Last year it was held in Albania, this year it's in Armenia. To organise such an event we need to have contacts at the host authority so we start emailing each other well before the event. Then I personally visit the host country where we clarify the details of the meeting and after the seminar we discuss the impressions and the feedback. For these kinds of activities it is essential to have contacts with my counterparts. Once a year in the regional centre we organise a meeting for the heads of the target authorities to get to know their needs for the coming year and to discuss the usefulness of the previous programmes.

Our decisions and their outcomes have had huge media coverage. Our advocacy actions, such as the latest on the liberalisation in the pharmaceutical sector, have prompted some vivid debates in Parliament. Through our activities in the development of competition we have supported some projects that would have not been realised without our financial support. We put the GVH and its activities on the map.