

# Multi-homing in the sale of used cars and competition law

In our practice, we can see an increasing number of cases addressed by competition authorities relating to data portability between separate online platforms and the interoperability of various information systems, for example via APIs. Such cases have generally come up in flight ticket sales, job portals, real estate listings, and communication tools. Now the focus is on the automotive industry. Data portability has started attracting competition authorities' attention, as they strive to keep pace with technological progress and seek new harm theories for the modern world.

## What happens when a dominant platform cuts off a smaller competitor from the data it needs?

One typical example of how online platforms are used in the automotive sector is the sale of used motor vehicles. Such websites can bring together many users in one place, regardless of whether they're looking to sell their used car or are on the hunt for a new one. If their expectations match, they can easily complete their transaction directly using the platform.

*AutoScout24*, a platform operating in the used car sales sector on the Belgian market, holds a relatively strong position there. Alongside it, there is also a smaller rival portal operated by *TCS Mobility*. To enable sellers to advertise on both sites simultaneously, data was automatically transferred between the two platforms. An ad placed on *AutoScout24* automatically appeared on the *TCS Mobility* portal without any additional work on the part of the seller.



The situation changed when *TCS Mobility* revised its pricing model, switching to a pay-per-lead model. The *AutoScout24* platform responded by suspending the automatic transfer of data to *TCS Mobility*. As a result, sellers who wanted to advertise their used car on both websites had to enter each ad manually twice. However, *AutoScout24* selectively suspended data transfers only in relation to the portal operated by *TCS Mobility*, whilst continuing to cooperate with other competing portals.

That might seem to be a mere administrative hassle for used car dealers. The opposite is true, however, as the increased burden may discourage consumers from multi-homing, i.e. the easy use of several platforms at the same time. For *TCS Mobility*, this led to a dramatic decline in the number of ads posted on its portal, as well as to a drop in traffic from both advertisers and those interested in buying a used car, and consequently, a reduction in profits.

*TCS Mobility* lodged a complaint about said conduct with the Belgian Competition Authority (**BCA**). The BCA opened a formal investigation and, at the end of April 2026, even issued an [interim measure](#)<sup>[1]</sup>,<sup>[2]</sup> ordering *AutoScout24* to restore the automatic transfer of ad data to the portal operated by *TCS Mobility*. If *AutoScout24* failed to do so within the specified time limit, it would have to pay a penalty of €20,000 for each day of delay, up to a total of €7,000,000. The BCA concluded that cutting off a competitor from the necessary data appears, at first glance, to constitute an abuse of a dominant position.

It should be noted that the proceedings themselves are still ongoing. The BCA has not yet proved any infringement of competition law.

## Why continue to monitor the case?

The Belgian case involving *AutoScout24* is of interest to competition lawyers for two reasons.

**First**, it shows that competition authorities are not afraid to constantly come up with new theories of harm. The crux of the dispute lies not so much in the use of a specific technology or the



setting of commercial terms, but rather in the protection of an economic mechanism known as multi-homing. The easier it is for consumers to switch between platforms or combine them, the harder it is for dominant businesses to maintain their dominant position. On the contrary, as soon as a dominant player makes multi-homing more difficult (whether technically, contractually or by adding an economic burden), it effectively maintains or even strengthens its dominance.

Naturally, this is one of the cases that reminds us of the Digital Markets Act (**DMA**), the EU regulation requiring entities called gatekeepers (platforms operated by tech giants) to ensure data portability and openness towards third parties. The DMA prevents cases like the *AutoScout24* case. But today's gatekeepers are exclusively global players such as Google, Meta, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and ByteDance. The DMA does not apply, given its very nature, to regional platforms such as *AutoScout24*.

In such cases, competition law remains the primary instrument, prohibiting, amongst other things, the abuse of a dominant position. As we can see in cases across Europe, including Czechia and Slovakia, the digital sector is becoming a priority for both national competition authorities and the European Commission: both within the scope of the DMA but also in areas of traditional antitrust law not covered by the DMA.

**Second**, the institution of interim measures can be clearly a suitable tool for digital platforms to quickly and effectively adjust market conditions, ensuring that competitors and customers of dominant businesses do not suffer harm during the competition authority's investigation, which may last several years. In the world of ones and zeros, it can be relatively easy to make the necessary data available to third parties, for example via an API, an interface that enables different systems to communicate with one another.

Competition authorities rarely issue interim measures. For example, the last time the Czech Competition Authority issued such a measure was more than twenty years ago. Nor has the European

Commission, as the EU's competition authority, issued many interim measures to date.

However, one such was published in June 2026. And it is no coincidence that this once again concerns data portability from a dominant platform to third parties who need the data. Specifically, the *WhatsApp* platform must make its data available to independent AI assistants via its API for the duration of the European Commission's investigation.

## Conclusion

What else is there to say? Perhaps that in the world of digital platforms, we have some interesting times ahead of us. This concerns not only the most well-known online services, such as social media and instant messaging apps, but also traditional sectors, which are becoming increasingly digitalised. If we were to take a guess, this is only a harbinger of what is yet to come with the rise of artificial intelligence.

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[https://www.belgiancompetition.be/sites/default/files/content/download/files/20260430\\_Press\\_release\\_18\\_BCA.pdf](https://www.belgiancompetition.be/sites/default/files/content/download/files/20260430_Press_release_18_BCA.pdf)

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[https://www.belgiancompetition.be/sites/default/files/content/download/files/20260430\\_Press\\_release\\_18\\_BCA.pdf](https://www.belgiancompetition.be/sites/default/files/content/download/files/20260430_Press_release_18_BCA.pdf)