

Competition

“The firm’s reputation in Brussels and throughout Europe is unmatched. Van Bael & Bellis is always my first call in the EU”

Legal 500

EU COMPETITION PRACTICE

Van Bael & Bellis is widely recognised as one of the leading competition law practices in Europe. Since the mid-1970s, members of our firm have been involved in many of the seminal cases in the field.

With one of the largest competition law teams in Brussels, our firm has extensive expertise in all aspects of EU competition law, including: cartels and other types of agreements between competitors, abuses of dominance, merger control, the licensing and use of intellectual property rights, the establishment and operation of distribution systems and state aid.

In view of the multinational composition of our firm, with more than 20 nationalities represented, we also assist clients in EU Member State proceedings, including merger control filings at EU Member States level. We also coordinate merger control filings internationally.

“PREFERRED EU COMPETITION LAW FIRM”

As a result of our work on complex and innovative cases, we have developed longstanding relationships with our clients, including many Fortune 500 and leading global companies, who consider us to be their “preferred EU competition law firm”. In this capacity, we handle the full range of competition issues which our clients face throughout the EEA, from defending them in investigations to providing counsel on how to avoid an investigation.

What sets Van Bael & Bellis apart is the size and depth of our competition team - 14 partners and 8 counsel, many of them with more than 20 years of experience. We also have unparalleled expertise in litigating competition issues before the EU Courts, gained from our representation of international clients in landmark EU competition cases such as United Brands, AKZO, Michelin I and II, Woodpulp (representing International Paper), Microsoft, Intel, Google/Android and CISAC to name only a few.

Van Bael & Bellis

Van Bael & Bellis is a leading independent law firm based in Brussels, London and Geneva (which latter office is exclusively dedicated to WTO matters). We are known for our client-centred approach, commitment to excellence and extensive expertise in EU competition law, EU and international trade law, EU regulatory law as well as Belgian business law. With 80 lawyers coming from 20 different countries, we offer our clients the support of a highly effective team of professionals with multi-jurisdictional expertise and an international perspective.

“Exceptionally competent,
business-minded and
very reactive in their replies:
all one can need!”

Legal 500

CARTELS

Van Bael & Bellis has successfully represented clients in European Commission investigations, helping them to escape infringement decisions and the imposition of fines.

We have also successfully assisted clients in obtaining the annulment of infringement decisions or substantial reductions in fine before the EU Courts.

Our firm has considerable experience both in assisting clients during the EU settlement procedure as well as in obtaining partial or total immunity under the Commission's leniency programme.

Notable assignments

Van Bael & Bellis' extensive experience includes:

- > Assisting JTEKT, a large Japanese multinational, in securing full immunity from fines under the Commission's leniency programme during the European Commission's investigation into the automotive bearings cartel which concluded in 2014. We also assisted the client in navigating through the Commission's settlement procedure.
- > Representing Innolux in its appeal before the EU General Court against the € 300 million fine imposed by the European Commission in the LCD panel cartel case. On 27 February 2014, the General Court reduced the fine imposed on Innolux by € 12 million on the ground that the Commission made errors with regard to calculating the fine.
- > Assisting Carpenter in the settlement procedure in the flexible polyurethane foam case which concluded in 2014.
- > Representing Dole and Dole Fresh Fruit Europe (“DFFE”) in their appeals before the General Court and the Court of Justice against the Commission's 2008 Decision imposing a fine of € 45.6 million for DFFE's participation in a cartel with Chiquita and Del Monte/Weichert. The case was unique in that the Commission classified an information exchange practice (which it did not itself claim to be a price-fixing cartel) as an infringement “by object”.
- > Representing Japan Airlines, Japan's largest flag carrier, and Thai Airways in the cartel proceeding initiated by the Commission against more than 20 airlines in the airfreight sector. The Commission dropped its charges against Thai Airways. We successfully acted for Japan Airlines in its appeal to the General Court. On 16 December 2015, the General Court upheld the appeal and annulled the € 35.7 million fine imposed on the company. We also act as coordinating counsel in defending Japan Airlines against national damages actions.

“One client simply describes the team as ‘outstanding in competition law advice’”

Chambers Europe

“Clients enthuse that ‘they are our go-to team for EU-wide competition law advice’”

Chambers Global

ABUSES OF DOMINANCE

Van Bael & Bellis is among the most experienced law firms in defending abuses of dominance cases before the European Commission and EU Courts.

Notable assignments

Van Bael & Bellis' extensive experience includes:

- > Supporting Google in its appeal before the General Court challenging the Commission's 2018 Google/Android decision imposing a record fine of € 4.34 billion for allegedly imposing unlawful restrictions on Android mobile device manufacturers and mobile network operators.
- > Supporting Intel in its historic victory before the Court of Justice against the Commission's 2009 decision imposing a record fine of € 1.06 billion for allegedly providing incentives to customers in exchange for exclusivity.
- > Representing Microsoft before the Commission and EU Courts against allegations of refusal to supply interoperability information and tying of Windows Media Player. We also represented Microsoft in its appeal against allegations of non-compliance with the Commission decision, obtaining a € 39 million reduction in the fine.
- > Assisting Canon before the European Commission in relation to an Article 102 complaint filed by EFIM, a European association of producers of printer ink, with respect to alleged exclusionary practices concerning printer cartridges. The Commission rejected EFIM's complaint in May 2009, a decision upheld on appeal by the EU Courts.

- > Representing Honda Motor Co. in the Commission's investigation of a complaint filed by BR-V against Honda, the FIA, the FIM and others alleging exclusionary conduct in respect of engine technology used in Formula One and Moto GP racing. The complaint was rejected by the Commission.

MERGER CONTROL

Van Bael & Bellis has a dedicated team of merger control specialists and regularly represents merging parties in cases involving key issues of jurisdiction, procedure and substantive law. We have succeeded in obtaining clearance of numerous complex transactions before the European Commission.

With our large number of lawyers qualified to practise in a number of Member States, we also routinely help clients to obtain clearance from Member State authorities for transactions which do not meet EU thresholds.

We are also frequently called on to coordinate merger control filing efforts across the world, working with local counsel.

We are also increasingly retained to challenge mergers which pose a strategic threat to the business of our clients, and have had notable successes by combining our deep experience in merger control with our broader expertise in adversarial proceedings.

"This firm provides top-flight representation for merger clearances as well as the full range of cartel, dominance and other competition law matters"

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Notable assignments

Van Bael & Bellis' extensive experience includes:

- > Representing Boeing in the context of the EU merger control review of its proposed acquisition of the Brazilian airplane manufacturer Embraer.
- > Representing Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri in the context of the EU merger control review of its proposed acquisition of the French shipbuilder Chantiers de l'Atlantique.
- > Representing Halliburton in the context of the EU merger control review of its proposed \$ 34.6 billion acquisition of Baker Hughes. This was one of the largest and most complex transactions ever to be subject to an EU merger control proceeding.
- > Representing Skype and its parent company Silver Lake on the EU merger control aspects of Microsoft's successful \$ 8.5 billion acquisition of Skype. The transaction, the largest acquisition ever by Microsoft at the time, was unconditionally approved by the European Commission after a first phase review, which was upheld on appeal. This transaction was voted Merger Control Matter of the Year at the 2012 Global Competition Review (GCR) awards.
- > Representing the Japanese steel industry in successfully opposing the creation of the proposed \$ 120 billion iron ore production joint venture (JV) between leading global mining companies BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto. Our firm's involvement in this assignment won us the award for M&A Transaction of the Year – Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa at the 2011 Global Competition Review (GCR) awards.
- > Representing Euroclear, the global leader in the settlement, safe keeping and servicing of securities, in successfully challenging the proposed merger between Deutsche Börse and London Stock Exchange which was prohibited by the European Commission.
- > Representing Canon in its acquisition of capture software company I.R.I.S. by successfully steering the planned acquisition through referrals from seven Member States to the European Commission and obtaining an unconditional first phase merger control clearance.
- > Representing Motorola Solutions, the world's leading supplier of ruggedized tablets, handheld computers and barcode scanners, in its acquisition of Psion, one of Motorola's main rivals in this space, by conducting the global filing assessment and coordinating the efforts to file and obtain approval of the deal in the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada and Portugal. After detailed investigations, the transaction was approved unconditionally in all four jurisdictions.
- > Representing Taiwanese Hon Hai/Foxconn group in the merger control proceedings before the European Commission regarding the strategic global partnership in consumer electronics entered into between Hon Hai and Sharp.
- > Representing the Saudi petrochemicals leader, SABIC, in obtaining merger control approval from the European Commission for its \$ 11.6 billion acquisition of GE Plastics.

"The team looks for cost-effective and time-efficient solutions and is not shy of engaging with the regulators/authorities in a formal or informal way using all of the firm's available resources"

Legal 500

"A safe home for a complex competition problem"

Legal 500

- > Representing Novartis regarding its acquisition of sole control over Chiron, a company active in human vaccines, biopharmaceuticals and blood testing, and assisting Novartis in the parallel merger notification proceedings in Albania, Bulgaria and Turkey.

STATE AID

Van Bael & Bellis has experience advising on a wide variety of complex state aid issues. In various cases before the Commission and the EU Courts, the firm's lawyers have represented alleged aid recipients, complainants, intervening third parties and Member State government entities accused of granting illegal aid in sectors as diverse as steel, zinc, cement, consumer electronics, aerospace and defence equipment. We also assess proposed aid schemes and advise clients on the potential risk of these schemes under the EU state aid rules as well as counsel non-EU Member States on state aid issues.

Notable assignments

Van Bael & Bellis' extensive experience includes:

- > Successfully assisting SEA SpA, the state-owned operator of the Milan airports, in the EU state aid investigation concerning ground-handling services at those airports and in the implementation of the European Commission's decision declaring the state aid granted by SEA SpA to its subsidiary SEA Handling to be incompatible with EU state aid rules.

- > Successfully representing the Romanian electricity distributor S.C. Electromagnetica S.A. in a state aid investigation initiated by the European Commission, which concerned allegations that aid was granted in the form of preferential tariffs in electricity supply contracts between electricity producer S.C. Hidroelectrica S.A., majority-owned by the Romanian State, and several electricity traders, including Electromagnetica.
- > Representing the Italian Region of Campania before the European Commission in the assessment of a series of financial measures with a value of over € 1.5 billion to verify their compliance with EU state aid rules.
- > Assisting SOITEC in relation to the notification of a € 12.25 million French state aid package to the European Commission for the Bernin 2010 project. This was one of the first notifications handled by the Commission under the new Community Framework on Research, Development and Innovation Aid.
- > Representing PSEG, a NYSE listed energy company, and its Polish subsidiary, Elcho, on state aid proceedings initiated by the European Commission against Poland in relation to long-term electricity supply contracts.



“Van Bael & Bellis remain in my view one of the best boutiques in EU and competition. The quality of their work is outstanding,” says one peer”

Chambers Europe

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LICENSING

Van Bael & Bellis regularly advises multinational clients in the licensing of intellectual property rights.

In addition, the firm was heavily involved in the appeals against the Commission's first decision on “reverse-payment” patent settlements in the pharmaceutical industry.

CONCERTED PRACTICES

Van Bael & Bellis' vast competition expertise extends to concerted practices as evidenced by the firm's successful representation of CISAC as well as eight individual copyright management societies in achieving an exceptional result from the EU's General Court in 2013. In particular, we obtained, on substantive grounds, the annulment of the principal part of the Commission's 2008 CISAC decision which had found CISAC and its European members – copyright management societies in different EU Member States – to have engaged in concerted practices in violation of EU competition law. We also coordinated appeals lodged by other society members of CISAC.

DISTRIBUTION

Van Bael & Bellis regularly advises multinational clients in structuring - and defending - complex pan-European distribution systems, often focusing on issues of pricing and selective distribution. The firm has particularly strong practices in the consumer goods sector and the highly regulated fields of pharmaceutical, and motor vehicle, distribution.

“Van Bael & Bellis’ longstanding track-record in headline behavioural and transactional competition mandates ensures that it consistently attracts high-end work from blue-chip clients”

Legal 500 2019

“The lawyers are ‘never afraid of digging very deep and making complex analyses but at the same time are very commercial’”

Chambers Europe

NATIONAL COMPETITION ADVICE

Van Bael & Bellis regularly advises on the national competition laws of the major EU Member States. Our broad national diversity means that we routinely handle antitrust and merger control cases before national competition authorities and national courts, as well as arbitral panels.

Notable assignments

Van Bael & Bellis’ extensive experience includes:

- > Assisting EDF Luminus in challenging, along with other electricity producers, the network tariffs charged for the transmission of electricity by Belgian transmission network operator Elia before the Brussels Court of Appeal. EDF Luminus prevailed and the Court of Appeal annulled the tariffs on various grounds including the incompatibility with EU law, discrimination and distortion of competition.
- > Representing Rockwool, one of the world’s largest manufacturers of construction materials, in their acquisition of Chicago Metallic Corporation by taking the lead on the global filing assessment and handling the merger filings in a number of EU Member States.
- > Assisting Coca-Cola Enterprises Belgium (CCEB) on various advisory issues related to Belgian competition law. In addition, Van Bael & Bellis represented CCEB in regard to an informal complaint lodged by a beverage wholesaler with the Belgian Competition Authority, based on allegations of an abuse of dominance, where the Competition Authority decided not to open a formal investigation.
- > Assisting Michelin in an investigation of alleged abuse of a dominant position in Romania and obtaining the rejection of the complaint by the Romanian competition authority.
- > Representing a large multinational company in the French Competition Authority’s investigation into allegations of anti-competitive practices in the building materials sector.
- > Representing a global beverage company in the Swedish Competition Authority’s investigation into alleged anti-competitive practices in the Swedish Horeca sector.

COMPLIANCE

Van Bael & Bellis regularly develops and implements compliance programmes and compliance training for clients. As part of our compliance training practice, we have developed an award-winning DVD, "Complying with EU Competition Law", which is available in ten languages and gives practical advice on EU compliance issues.

PUBLICATIONS

Van Bael & Bellis is the author of one of the leading reference sources for companies, law firms and universities – "Competition Law of the European Union" (6th edition, 2021).

In addition, we serve as the General Editors of one of The European Lawyer Reference Series' most popular publications: Sweet & Maxwell International Series, "Merger Control", a comparison of 52 of the world's leading merger control jurisdictions, now in its third edition (2017).

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"Van Bael & Bellis is in a unique position. With almost 30 years of experience, the firm now boasts an antitrust team that rivals the Brussels offices of Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton and Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer in size and quality of work."

Global Competition Review

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