Google loses final EU court appeal against 2.4 billion euro fine in antitrust shopping case

AP — Google lost its final legal challenge on Tuesday against a European Union penalty for giving its own shopping recommendations an illegal advantage over rivals in search results, ending a long-running antitrust case that came with a whopping fine.

The European Union's Court of Justice upheld a lower court's decision, rejecting the company's appeal against the 2.4 billion euro ($2.7 billion) penalty from the European Commission, the 27-nation bloc's top antitrust enforcer.

"By today's judgment, the Court of Justice dismisses the appeal and thus upholds the judgment of the General Court," the court said in a press release summarizing its decision.

Google didn't respond immediately to a request for comment.

The commission's original decision in 2017 accused the Silicon Valley giant of unfairly directing visitors to its own Google Shopping service to the detriment of competitors. It was one of three multibillion-euro fines that the commission imposed on Google in the previous decade as Brussels started ramping up its crackdown on the tech industry.

Google made changes to comply with the commission's decision requiring it to treat competitors equally. The company started holding auctions for shopping search listings that it would bid for alongside other comparison shopping services.

At the same time, the company appealed the decision to the

courts. But the EU General Court, the tribunal's lower section, rejected its challenge in 2021 and the Court of Justice's adviser later recommended rejecting the appeal.

European consumer group BEUC hailed the court's decision, saying it shows how the bloc's competition law "remains highly relevant" in digital markets.

"Google harmed millions of European consumers by ensuring that rival comparison shopping services were virtually invisible," director general Agustín Reyna said. "Google's illegal practices prevented consumers from accessing potentially cheaper prices and useful product information from rival comparison shopping services on all sorts of products, from clothes to washing machines."

Google is still appealing the other two EU antitrust penalties, which involved its Android mobile operating system and AdSense advertising platform. The company was dealt a setback in the Android case when the EU General Court upheld the commission's 4.125 billion euro fine in a 2022 decision. Its initial appeal against a 1.49 billion euro fine in the AdSense case has yet to be decided.

Those three cases foreshadowed expanded efforts by regulators worldwide to crack down on the tech industry. The EU has since opened more investigations into Big Tech companies and drafted new laws to clean up social media platforms and regulate artificial intelligence.

Google is now facing particular pressure over its lucrative digital advertising business. In a federal antitrust trial that began Monday, the U.S. Department of Justice is alleging the company holds a monopoly in the "ad tech" industry.

British competition regulators accused Google last week of abusing its dominance in ad tech while the EU is carrying out its own investigation.