

# German plate embossing companies fined for anticompetitive practices in the sale of number plates

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The Bundeskartellamt has imposed fines totalling approx. eight million euros on Christoph Kroschke GmbH, EHA Autoschilder GmbH, Astorga Fritz Lange GmbH & Co. Schilder und Stempelfabriken KG and Tonjes Holding AG as well as five individuals involved for anticompetitive practices in the sale of vehicle registration plates to end customers in Germany.

Andreas Mundt, President of the Bundeskartellamt: "At least from 2000 until early 2015 representatives of leading plate embossing companies restricted competition on the local markets for the sale of stamped registration plates. The companies exchanged competition-relevant information and cooperated with one another in various ways. A key area of cooperation are the so-called "Kostenstellenvereinbarungen" by which the companies agreed with one another on which of them would be allowed to operate a stamping shop on a certain local market and which companies would not. The total income, costs and profits of the designated stamping shop would then be pooled to rule out any entrepreneurial and competitive risk."

Consumers wishing to have their vehicle licensed first have to apply for vehicle registration at a vehicle licensing office and then have a number plate made by a registration plate embossing company. The number plate is stamped on special machines in the stamping shops and the finished number plate (still without the technical inspection sticker and official seal) is sold to the customer. The stamped number plate must then be presented again at the licensing office where the official seal is applied. The total market volume for stamped number plates amounts to around 25 million number plates per year. The sales price to private customers during the period of infringement was between approx. 20 and 30 euros per pair of plates. The anticompetitive cooperation took place in different forms and at various levels of involvement on approx. 40% of over 700 local number plate supplier markets in Germany.

All the companies and individuals involved acknowledged the facts as established by the Bundeskartellamt and agreed to a settlement. In setting the fines the authority also took account of the fact that except for Astorga Fritz Lange GmbH & Co. Schilder und Stempelfabriken KG and an individual involved, the companies had cooperated with the Bundeskartellamt throughout the proceeding.

Investigations against eight other companies will be terminated for discretionary reasons.

The fining decisions are not yet final and can be appealed along with the findings contained in them to the Düsseldorf Higher Regional Court.

A case summary (in German) in accordance with Section 53(5) of the German Competition Act (GWB) will be published shortly on the Bundeskartellamt's website.