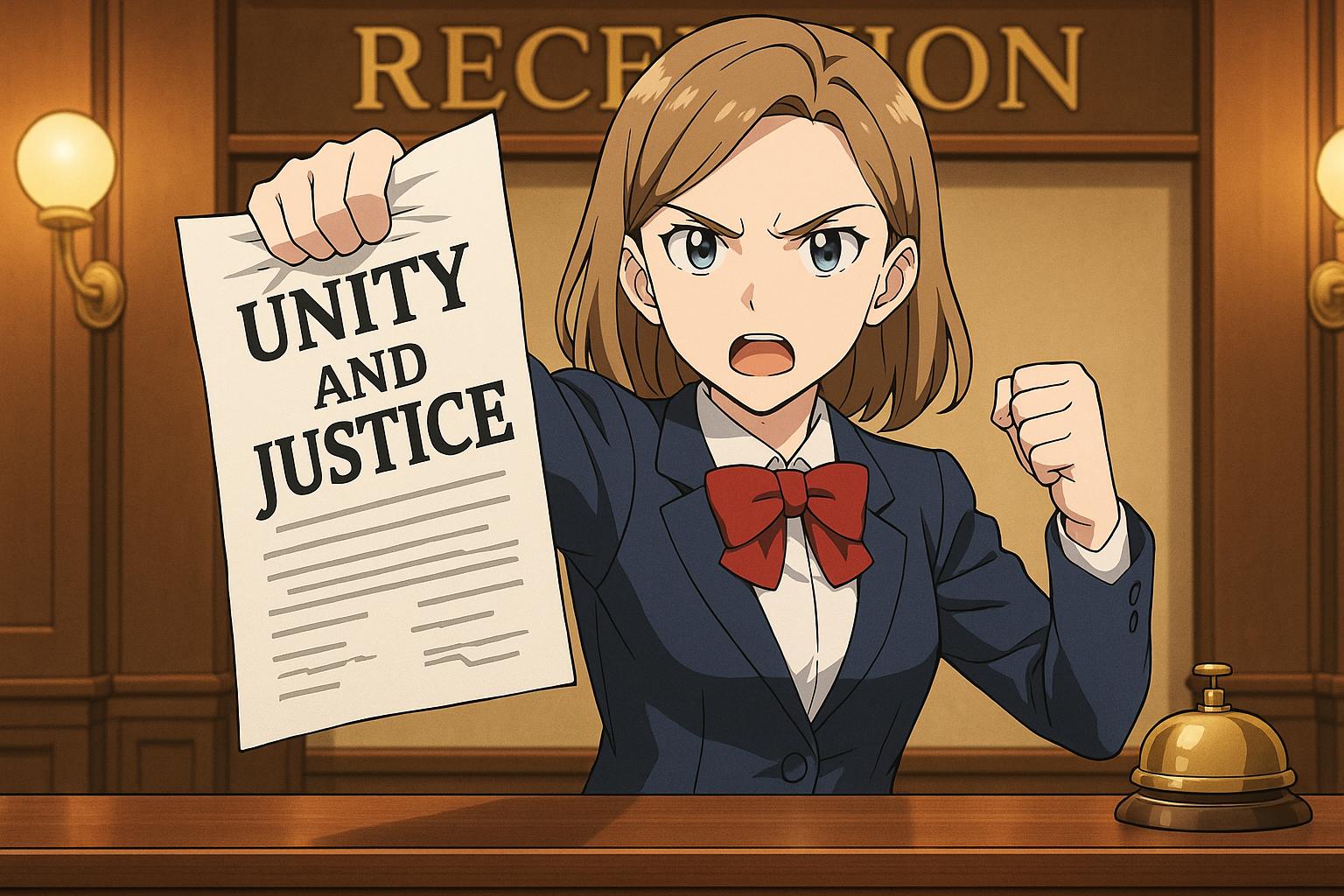
# Europe’s hotel associations launch €3 billion lawsuit against Booking.com over price-fixing clauses



Europe’s hospitality sector is taking a significant stand against Booking.com in a landmark legal action that promises to reshape the online booking landscape. More than 25 national hotel associations have banded together, filing a broad continental lawsuit to demand accountability and financial compensation from the online travel platform. This unprecedented collective action, strongly supported by the hospitality umbrella organisation HOTREC, stems from long-standing complaints about restrictive pricing practices that hotel operators claim have stifled competition and inflated commission rates for nearly two decades.

At the heart of the lawsuit are “rate parity clauses,” contractual agreements that prevent hotels from advertising lower prices on their own websites or through alternative booking platforms. This policy has profoundly limited the autonomy of thousands of hotels across Europe, resulting in higher operational costs and diminished pricing flexibility. With the European Court of Justice ruling in September 2024 that these practices contravene EU competition law, the legal landscape shifted dramatically, empowering the hotel associations in their quest for redress.

The central ruling deemed that Booking.com's clauses hindered fair competition and particularly disadvantaged smaller, independent hotels. This decision echoes broader concerns about the dominance of major digital platforms, which have increasingly been scrutinised by regulators. In related moves, the European Commission has enforced new competition rules under the Digital Markets Act, effective from May 2024, compelling Booking.com to relinquish certain restrictive practices. These recent developments align with a growing recognition within the hospitality sector of the need to restore balance between traditional service providers and tech giants.

As this legal battle unfolds, hotels in Europe are poised to potentially recover significant claims. According to estimates, damages could total over €3 billion for the sector, calculated on losses incurred as a result of the problematic clauses from 2004 to 2024. This amount is particularly critical for small and medium-sized hotel operators who have felt the pressure of high commission rates while lacking the power to negotiate favourable terms.

The coordinated approach reflects the widespread discontent among hoteliers from various nations—including Austria, Belgium, Greece, and Italy—catapulting their grievances onto an international platform. Notably, the Greek hotel industry, represented by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, has also signalled its intention to pursue similar legal action, further demonstrating the pervasive impact of Booking.com's pricing policies.

The simplicity of the claims process is designed to facilitate broad participation. Hotels need only to prove they paid commissions to Booking.com over the specified timeframe to join the collective action. This user-friendly structure aims to minimise legal costs and expedite the process for hotel operators keen to protect their rights and regain pricing control.

This lawsuit signifies not only a recoil against restrictive practices but also a broader push within the European hospitality industry to assert its independence in a rapidly evolving digital economy. Industry leaders argue that revitalising competition could yield benefits for customers and providers alike, enabling hotels to offer more competitive pricing and engaging loyalty programmes without being shackled by platform limitations.

The case has the potential to set a precedent—not just within the hospitality industry but across various sectors grappling with similar imbalances. As European hoteliers unite to reclaim their market standing, the implications extend to the viability of digital marketplaces that utilise restrictive contractual practices. Enhanced regulatory scrutiny foreshadows possible changes in the operational frameworks of other platforms, urging compliance with EU directives to avoid further legal entanglements.

As Europe's hotel sector seeks to rebound from recent global disruptions and recalibrate its pricing strategies, this collective legal action embodies a quest for equity amidst the challenges posed by dominant online intermediaries. It reflects an urgent call for justice and reform in the digital age, where the autonomy of service providers must be balanced against the power of influential platforms, ensuring a fair marketplace for all stakeholders involved.

In conclusion, as more hoteliers join this movement, the outcome could significantly reconfigure the digital booking dynamics, potentially offering a new chapter for European hospitality that prioritises fairness and consumer choice.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.travelandtourworld.com/news/article/europe-launches-powerful-continental-lawsuit-as-hotel-industry-demands-accountability-and-compensation-from-booking-com/), [[5]](https://www.ekathimerini.com/economy/1254468/hoteliers-consider-collective-legal-action-against-booking-com/)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.travelandtourworld.com/news/article/europe-launches-powerful-continental-lawsuit-as-hotel-industry-demands-accountability-and-compensation-from-booking-com/), [[6]](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2024/05/17/booking-com-contrainte-de-se-soumettre-aux-nouvelles-regles-de-concurrence-de-bruxelles_6233785_3234.html)
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2. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/bookingcom-targeted-hotels-plan-dutch-damages-claims-over-price-clauses-2025-05-28/> - In May 2025, 26 European hotel associations supported potential damages claims against Booking.com in the Netherlands, following a 2024 European Court of Justice ruling that found the company's price parity clauses unnecessary and potentially restrictive to market competition. Although not deemed anti-competitive under EU law, these clauses raised regulatory concerns across Europe. The case originated when Booking.com sought a Dutch court ruling on the legality of parity clauses, leading the court to seek guidance from the ECJ. HOTREC, representing 47 hospitality associations across 36 European nations, endorsed the hotels' pursuit of damages, citing longstanding unfair practices. Booking.com contested interpretations of the judgment, clarifying that it only pertains to historic German cases between 2006 and 2016, and that the Amsterdam Court still needs to decide on those specific clauses. Hotels have until July 31 to join the damages litigation, with associations from a broad range of European countries supporting the move, although they are not themselves claimants. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/bookingcom-targeted-hotels-plan-dutch-damages-claims-over-price-clauses-2025-05-28/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://cincodias.elpais.com/companias/2025-02-08/la-millonaria-guerra-de-los-hoteles-con-booking-3000-millones-en-danos.html> - In February 2025, Spain's hotel sector sought to sue Booking.com over price parity clauses that prevented hotels from marketing rooms at lower prices on other sales channels. Following a European Court of Justice ruling in September 2024, hotels could claim up to €3 billion in damages for losses incurred from 2004 to 2024, when the rate limitation was applied. The Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourist Accommodations (Cehat) and the Spanish Association of Hotel Directors (AEDH), along with various law firms, are assessing the economic damage and preparing lawsuits. Meanwhile, Booking.com rejects these claims, arguing that its policies benefit all stakeholders and criticising the interpretations of the hoteliers' legal advisors. ([cincodias.elpais.com](https://cincodias.elpais.com/companias/2025-02-08/la-millonaria-guerra-de-los-hoteles-con-booking-3000-millones-en-danos.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://cincodias.elpais.com/companias/2024-09-20/el-fallo-europeo-sobre-booking-alienta-las-demandas-de-los-hoteleros-espanoles-tras-la-sancion-de-la-cnmc.html> - In September 2024, the European Court of Justice ruled that Booking.com's price parity clauses, which prevented hotels from offering lower prices on other platforms, were unnecessary and restricted competition. This ruling coincided with a €413 million fine imposed by Spain's National Commission on Markets and Competition (CNMC) for anti-competitive practices. Spanish hoteliers are now planning to claim damages. The ECJ's decision originated from a preliminary ruling by the Amsterdam District Court and is based on a lawsuit against an unfavourable German ruling. Although the ruling has broad effects, Booking.com no longer applies these restrictions. The decision could also influence a fine imposed in Spain by the CNMC and a potential class-action lawsuit by affected Spanish hotels. ([cincodias.elpais.com](https://cincodias.elpais.com/companias/2024-09-20/el-fallo-europeo-sobre-booking-alienta-las-demandas-de-los-hoteleros-espanoles-tras-la-sancion-de-la-cnmc.html?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.ekathimerini.com/economy/1254468/hoteliers-consider-collective-legal-action-against-booking-com/> - In November 2024, Greek hoteliers, led by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, considered collective legal action against Booking.com to challenge its pricing-policy restrictions, alleging they cost the industry millions of euros. This initiative followed a European Court of Justice decision that determined Booking.com's pricing policies were detrimental to hoteliers. The issue centres on the platform's requirement for hoteliers to maintain rate parity, prohibiting them from offering room prices lower than those displayed on the platform's listings. Commissions to Booking.com range between 15% and 27%, with higher fees linked to participation in promotional programs. Alexandros Vassilikos, President of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels and HOTREC, confirmed that a specialized law firm has been contracted to handle the case. However, it remains uncertain how many Greek hoteliers will join this class action. Experts estimate that the online hotel booking market in Greece is valued at roughly €2 billion annually. Out of this, Booking.com is estimated to earn about €200 million, holding a dominant market position with a 70% market share. ([ekathimerini.com](https://www.ekathimerini.com/economy/1254468/hoteliers-consider-collective-legal-action-against-booking-com/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2024/05/17/booking-com-contrainte-de-se-soumettre-aux-nouvelles-regles-de-concurrence-de-bruxelles_6233785_3234.html> - In May 2024, the European Commission imposed new competition rules on Booking.com under the Digital Markets Act (DMA) to prevent anti-competitive practices. The company, used by more than 10% of European clients, must comply within six months. Hotels must be able to access customers who booked through the platform directly and promote their offers outside of it. Booking.com is also required to inform Brussels of any planned mergers or acquisitions. European hotel associations welcomed these measures, denouncing unfair practices such as restricting best prices to own channels or not sharing customer data. Booking.com, which controls 71% of the European online booking market, is studying the compliance requirements and assures that the DMA will not have a significant impact on its business. However, the risk of circumventing the new rules remains a concern. ([lemonde.fr](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2024/05/17/booking-com-contrainte-de-se-soumettre-aux-nouvelles-regles-de-concurrence-de-bruxelles_6233785_3234.html?utm_source=openai))