Brussels presses Microsoft on antitrust ruling
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Microsoft is coming under pressure from the European Commission to comply swiftly and fully with the landmark antitrust sanctions imposed by the regulator last year or face further financial penalties.

The European Union's top antitrust regulator is understood to be unhappy with the way Microsoft intends to implement the March ruling. At the time, the Commission found Microsoft guilty of abusing a dominant position by shutting out rivals in adjacent markets such as media player software and servers.

Brussels ordered the group to pay a record €497m fine and make a version of Windows without its Media Player software available to consumers and computer manufacturers. In addition, the company must disclose sensitive information on its software to rival companies that would allow them to design systems that function smoothly with Windows-driven PCs.

People familiar with the talks between Microsoft and the Commission said the regulator was particularly unhappy about the group's plans to market the new version of Windows as a "Reduced Media Edition". Brussels argues that such a name would violate a clause in its decision, according to which Microsoft must not take any steps that would render the new version unattractive to consumers.

For the same reason, the Commission is also concerned about Microsoft's proposed "pop-ups" warning users that certain sites and programs might not work without Media Player. Brussels believes these would deter consumers from choosing the new version. Another point of contention is the level of royalties Microsoft may demand for information about its software.

Microsoft said: "Microsoft is fully committed to complying with the Commission's ruling and is working with the Commission towards that goal." It added that the group had signalled to the Commission that it was ready to accept a different name for the new version of Windows.

The Commission said Brussels had the possibility under EU law to impose fines worth up to 5 per cent of a company's daily turnover in cases where a business does not comply with an antitrust ruling on time.

It added that Microsoft had promised to comply with the ruling within six weeks of a December 22 court order that quashed the group's application to have the sanctions suspended. The order meant Microsoft had to implement the sanctions straight away rather than wait for the outcome of the appeal, likely to take two or three years.
Microsoft said it was ready to ship Windows without Media Player to computer makers.