



PRESS RELEASE No 168/23

Luxembourg, 9 November 2023

Judgment of the Court in Case C-319/22 | Gesamtverband Autoteile-Handel (Access to vehicle information)

Car manufacturers must make vehicle identification numbers available to independent operators

Where that number makes it possible to identify the owner of a vehicle, thus constituting personal data, that obligation is compatible with the General Data Protection Regulation.

EU law ¹ requires car manufacturers to make accessible to independent operators, including repairers, spare parts distributors and publishers of technical information, the information necessary for the repair and maintenance of the vehicles they manufacture.

A German trade association for the independent trade in motor vehicle parts considers that neither the form nor the content of the information provided by the manufacturer of heavy goods vehicles, Scania, to its members fulfils that obligation. In order to address that situation, that association brought proceedings before a German court. Uncertain as to the scope of Scania's obligations, that court in turn referred the matter to the Court of Justice. It wishes to know, inter alia, whether the vehicle identification number is to be regarded as personal data that manufacturers are required to communicate.

In response, the Court holds that **car manufacturers are required to provide access to all vehicle repair and maintenance information.**

That information does not necessarily have to be made accessible by a database interface allowing automated search with downloading of results. However, its format **must lend itself to direct electronic use.** Accordingly, it must enable the relevant data to be extracted and retained immediately after their collection. The Court also holds that **car manufacturers are required to set up a database,** which must cover information on parts that can be replaced by spare parts. It must be possible to search for information in that database according to vehicle identification numbers and other criteria, such as engine output or trim level of the vehicle.

The Court points out that **vehicle identification numbers must be included in the database.**

That number, taken as such, is not personal in nature. However, it becomes personal data when someone who has access to it has the means to identify the owner of the vehicle, provided that the person concerned is a natural person. The Court notes in that regard that the owner is, like the identification number, indicated in the registration certificate. Even where vehicle identification numbers are to be classified as personal data, **the General Data Protection Regulation ² does not preclude car manufacturers from being obliged to make them available to independent operators.**

NOTE: A reference for a preliminary ruling allows the courts and tribunals of the Member States, in disputes which

have been brought before them, to refer questions to the Court of Justice about the interpretation of EU law or the validity of an EU act. The Court of Justice does not decide the dispute itself. It is for the national court or tribunal to dispose of the case in accordance with the Court's decision, which is similarly binding on other national courts or tribunals before which a similar issue is raised.

Unofficial document for media use, not binding on the Court of Justice.

The [full text and, as the case may be, the abstract](#) of the judgment is published on the CURIA website on the day of delivery.

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Images of the delivery of the judgment are available on '[Europe by Satellite](#)' ☎ (+32) 2 2964106.

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1 [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/858](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 on the approval and market surveillance of motor vehicles and their trailers, and of systems, components and separate technical units intended for such vehicles.

2 [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.