

Rambus settles EU antitrust probe, avoids fines

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(AP) -- Memory chip company Rambus Inc. said Friday that European Union antitrust regulators had provisionally agreed to drop a probe and any fines if the company reduced its royalty rates for DRAM memory chip patents.

The European Commission in 2007 charged Rambus with monopoly abuse, alleging that the company set "unreasonable" royalties for DRAM patents fraudulently set as industry standards.

Any company that wanted to make DRAM, or Dynamic Random Access Memory, had to pay Rambus for the design it developed. The chips were used in personal computers, servers, printers, personal digital assistants and cameras.

Rambus said it would now offer licenses with maximum royalty rates for certain memory types and memory controllers.

The EU must check with other industry players that this satisfies antitrust concerns before the deal can be finalized.

This would end the company's antitrust disputes on both sides of the Atlantic over allegations of "patent abuse," where a company deceives a standards body by keeping secret the fact that it holds patents on technology that all players will later be forced to license.

Rambus said last month that the U.S. Federal Trade Commission had

dropped a similar probe.

Chip manufacturers claimed that Rambus was seeking royalties in the early 1990s even as it took part in industry-wide talks that set standards for chips that were to be made mandatory - giving the company a monopoly over key technology patents.

Los Altos, California-based Rambus has consistently denied wrongdoing.

Rambus was last year cleared of these charges by a U.S federal court which dismissed legal action by chip makers Micron Technology Inc. of Boise, Idaho, Hynix Semiconductor Inc. of Icheon, South Korea, and Nanya Technology Corp. of Kueishan, Taiwan.

They said Rambus had deliberately withheld information from the Joint Electron Device Engineering Council, or JEDEC, which counted Rambus as a member as it established guidelines for the computer [memory](#) industry.

The FTC ruled in 2006 that Rambus had violated antitrust laws. But the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit overturned the decision in 2008 and sent the case back to the FTC, saying the agency had not come up with enough evidence to prove that Rambus had sought a monopoly or hurt competition.

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