

Uber driver found guilty in Belgium crackdown

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A person holds a tablet with the Uber application open in Brussels on April 16, 2014

An Uber driver in Belgium was found guilty of breaking taxi laws on Monday, in the first case to land in a Brussels court after dozens of drivers were caught by police posing as clients of the banned service.

The driver was shown leniency with an unspecified suspended sentence,

the court said, but his car, a Renault Megane, was confiscated.

Uber is banned in Belgium, but operating under the alternative name UberPop, has continued to offer residents of Brussels a cheaper alternative to traditional taxis.

Authorities in the European capital for months turned a blind eye to the practice until pressure from the [taxi](#) lobby pushed police to organise sting operations to catch lawbreakers.

The case on Monday was the first of about 30 currently making their way through Belgian courts.

The local government in Brussels is largely sympathetic to Uber, and is in the process of drawing up an overhaul of the taxi industry to make room for the US company.

But tensions with taxi drivers have often reached a boiling point, with several reported cases of assaults on Uber drivers by angry gangs of cab drivers.

The Brussels mobility minister Pascal Smet said he wasn't surprised that the court had decided against Uber.

"We've said from day one that Uber wasn't possible in the current legal context, and this judgement confirms that," Smet said.

Smet is currently drawing up the new legal framework that faces the tall challenge of satisfying taxi drivers and making room for Uber.

Uber drivers are most often non-professionals without any particular approval to carry passengers.

The new law would radically change the legal landscape, Smet said, requiring that Uber [drivers](#) meet the same professional requirements as [taxi drivers](#).

Uber is under attack in numerous countries worldwide, facing legal challenges and limits on its activities.

Earlier this year, Uber filed complaints with the European Union against France, Germany and Spain, hitting back at efforts to ban it from the continent's streets.

Uber said efforts by national governments to shut it down breached EU laws on competition and the single market.

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