

Betting industry welcomes international match-fixing cooperation

Brussels, 18 September 2014: The European regulated betting industry welcomes the Council of Europe's Convention on match-fixing, which aims to prevent the manipulation of sports results. The EGBA, ESSA, and the RGA, believe that it represents a relatively positive and potentially significant development in the fight against sport and betting related fraud. At the same time, certain provisions raise concerns regarding their compatibility with EU law.

Maarten Haijer, Secretary General of the EGBA, stated: _“The convention rightly addresses match fixing as a cross border issue that requires international cooperation. It is our hope that it will further set the tone for a more effective cooperation between all stakeholders to eradicate match fixing. However, we are aware that the CJEU has rightly been asked to provide its opinion on the compatibility of the definition of ‘illegal sports betting’ with EU law, and consider that the application of at least this provision should be postponed until the CJEU has provided legal clarity.”_

Clive Hawkswood, Chief Executive of the RGA concluded that: _“The Convention discussions were at times challenging, with pressure from some stakeholders to introduce a sports betting right and even blanket restrictions on certain bet types. The regulated betting sector worked hard to explain why measures of this kind would not make any material difference to the integrity of sport.”_

_“The fact those provisions were not included is testament to the constructive policy adopted by the Council of Europe's

secretariat and many of its Member States. What we have now is a relatively balanced and workable framework, which rightly seeks to reflect the range of existing national regulatory frameworks rather than replace them. However there are still a small number of areas that we believe could be improved upon and we hope there will be opportunities to review them in due course”._

Khalid Ali, Secretary General of ESSA, added: _“The Convention is principally focused on addressing the danger to sport and to the regulated betting markets from match-fixing, which primarily emanates from organised international criminal gangs, corrupt sportspeople and the unregulated betting sector. As one of the potential victims of that criminal activity, the regulated betting sector welcomes the aims of the Convention, however, it is important that it does impose any unnecessary restrictions that could drive consumers to the unregulated markets.”_

An evidence-based report on sports betting was recently released by the three associations which found that the “proposal that new markets, such as in-play (or live) betting, offered by regulated betting operators should be restricted or prohibited on sporting integrity grounds does not, given the weight of independent data, appear to be a policy generated from any firm evidence base”.