

Harrah's Wins EU Approval for Buyout Bid

Brussels (AP) – Harrah's Entertainment Inc., the world's largest casino company, won EU regulatory approval Wednesday to be bought by two private equity groups for USD 17.1 billion (Euro 13 billion).

The European Commission said it automatically cleared the deal after receiving no complaints from rivals and identifying no antitrust problems within 25 working days.

The EU usually rules on combinations where companies have a joint global turnover of more than Euro 5 billion (USD 6 billion).

Harrah's board backed the USD 90-per-share buyout offer from Apollo Management Group and Texas Pacific Group in December and recommended shareholders approve the deal at an April 5 vote.

The buyers are also assuming USD 10.7 billion (Euro 8.13 billion) in debt in the deal.

It is the largest deal ever to take a publicly held casino company private and the seventh biggest leveraged buyout deal of any kind of company. The largest ever was RJR Nabisco Inc.'s USD 25 billion acquisition by Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. in 1998.

Harrah's is the world's largest casino company by revenue, operating 39 casinos across the United States, including Caesars Palace, Bally's and Paris on the Las Vegas Strip. It also has interests in Casino Windsor in Canada, to be renamed Caesars Windsor in early 2008, and Conrad Punta del Este in Uruguay.