

Ladbrokes Loses Dutch Court Ruling Over Online Bets

Ladbrokes Plc, the world's largest publicly traded gaming company, can't offer gambling in the Netherlands without a permit, the Dutch Supreme Court ruled.

The Harrow, England-based company violated Dutch law by allowing national residents to place bets on its Web site, the court said in a ruling today. The decision is contingent upon whether European Union tribunals rule the bloc's antitrust regulations supersede national gaming laws.

„This is not a done deal,“ said Judge Ernst Numann by telephone today. „It's the question if the ban on offering gambling in the Netherlands without a permit is in line with European law.“ The Dutch Supreme Court has asked the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg for guidance on the issue, he said.

The Netherlands is one of 10 EU countries, including France and Sweden, to draw a threat of legal action from the European Commission. EU Internal Markets Commissioner says laws that protect national gaming monopolies are a form of illegal discrimination.

„We're pleased the case is referred to the European Court of Justice,“ Ladbrokes spokesman Ciaran O'Brien said in a telephone interview. „We believe the Dutch law is inconsistent with the European treaty.“

De Lotto, the only permitted Dutch sports lottery operator, asked a lower court in 2005 to prohibit Ladbrokes from operating in the Dutch market. De Lotto uses 70 percent of its profit to support professional and amateur athletes.