

RGA welcomes pro-market aspects of the European Parliament's Online Gambling Resolution

The Remote Gambling Association (RGA), the largest remote gambling trade body in the world, has praised some of the more progressive elements of the European Parliament's resolution on online gambling, which was voted on and agreed today. The resolution demonstrates a clear shift in understanding and support for the European licensed online gambling sector. In particular, it presses the European Commission to ensure compliance with EU law and to pursue infringement proceedings against Member States that unjustifiably restrict access to their gambling markets.

The European Parliament's resolution follows the publication of the European Commission's Online Gambling Green Paper earlier this year. Led by Jurgen Creutzmann MEP, and supported by a number of progressive and pro-market orientated MEPs within the Parliament's influential Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) Committee, the resolution has some welcome elements for licensed private online gambling operators.

In particular, the resolution promotes:

- the provision of well-regulated online gambling services;
- cooperation between national gambling regulators;
- the need to avoid unnecessary licensing duplication and administrative burdens;
- notes that licensed betting operators help protect the integrity of sport;

- that more progress should be made on addressing infringement cases; and
- that the Commission should take action against violations of the EU Treaties.

“The European Parliament’s resolution demonstrates a marked change in approach. It now wants to regulate rather than prohibit, and it is pressing the Commission to act against Member States which unjustifiably restrict access to their gambling markets. The resolution is clear, reminding the Commission ‘of its duty to act swiftly upon receipt of complaints about violations of the freedoms enshrined in the Treaties.’ The licensed private remote gambling sector is in full support of those remarks,” Clive Hawkswood, RGA Chief Executive said.

Hawkswood also drew attention to the fact that the licensed private remote gambling sector had already been working to deliver European-wide standards, as promoted by the European Parliament’s resolution, most notably through the Responsible Remote Gambling Measures agreed with the EU recognised European Committee for Standardisation.

“The Parliament’s resolution insists that licensing procedures must be transparent and non-discriminatory, and avoid unnecessary duplication of requirements and controls carried out in Member States. There is no evidence that introducing a well-regulated licensing regime with multiple operators presents any more concerns than a monopoly. It is clear that Member States are increasingly coming to that conclusion,” Hawkswood emphasised, noting the recent moves to introduce licensing regimes in jurisdictions such as Denmark, Spain and Greece.

Unfortunately some politicians remain attached to some outdated and unworkable positions and continue to seek to deny access to markets, restrict competition within regulated frameworks and limit value and choice for EU consumers. Whilst

there is much in the resolution which is positive, it is disappointing that it includes a reference to a property right for sports event organisers from betting. This follows increasing lobbying by wealthy sporting bodies to unjustifiably manufacture new income from betting products in addition to the large amount of commercial income they already receive from the gambling sector.

Clive Hawkswood concluded by saying that: "There has been a welcome advance in understanding of the licensed remote gambling sector by many MEPs and recognition of the important economic role it plays in stimulating growth and innovation. Fundamentally, however, we should remember that this is a non-legislative process. The next steps in relation to the Parliament's resolution and the Commission's deliberations regarding its Green Paper exercise are unclear. In the meantime, we will continue to work with receptive and forward thinking Member States and to press the Commission to enforce EU law."