

European Parliament adopts Resolution on Online Gambling

The report on online gambling in the internal market prepared by the IMCO committee was adopted today in plenary session by the European Parliament.

While the RGA welcomes certain positive aspects of the report, it is disappointing that in places it contains unsubstantiated views about the online gambling sector and these appear to have been used to justify the call for unwarranted restrictions on the freedoms normally associated with the Internal Market.

The European Parliament's resolution follows the publication last year of the Commission's Action Plan on online gambling. Led by Ashley Fox MEP, the resolution has a number of positive elements for licensed private online gambling operators. In particular, the resolution promotes cooperation between national gambling regulators; the benefits of more transparent licensing procedures; and the need to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens.

Most welcome of all is that the resolution calls on the Commission to continue to enforce EU law and, if necessary, to pursue infringement proceedings against Member States that are not complying with the Internal Market rules.

Unfortunately, the resolution appears to have been unduly influenced by those members of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) Committee who are opposed to the opening of markets to licensed private sector online gambling companies. In doing so they have repeated flawed consumer protection arguments to justify the retention of barriers to market entry.

While the RGA actively supports the need to protect minors,

vulnerable people, and indeed all consumers from gambling related harm, any concerns in this area should be addressed through workable and coherent licensing regimes in Member States which apply in a non-discriminatory way to all types of operator.

The RGA shares the European Parliament's desire to safeguard the integrity of sports. However, it is fundamentally wrong to imply that the licensed betting industry presents the threat. On the contrary, it is proactively working with various national and international organisations, such as the IOC and Council of Europe, to help identify and combat the real causes for concern that tend to be associated with criminal enterprises and corrupt sporting participants.

Against this background, the unjustified call for restrictions on certain betting products is wrong and, even worse, would be ineffective. Quite simply, there is no evidence to suggest that certain types of bet when offered by licensed operators present any noticeable match-fixing risks.

Related to this, it is very unclear why a report about the regulation of online gambling should include support for 'a sports betting right' which is essentially a commercial rather than a regulatory issue. The RGA's strong opposition to the introduction of an unwarranted and legally dubious right of this kind remains unchanged.

Clive Hawkswood, CEO of the RGA said: 'Although we are dubious about some of the measures called for in this resolution, we are hopeful that it will put further pressure on the Commission to act against Member States that do not comply with EU law.'

Compliance with the rules of the Internal Market should be the number one priority for IMCO. Many serious infringement proceedings have been outstanding for five years already and we cannot believe that Commissioner Barnier will not rectify

that situation before he leaves the Commission in 2014.

We are therefore urging the Commission again to fulfil its obligation as the guardian of the Treaty and bring to an end the many breaches that have unfairly blighted our sector.'