



On-line gambling: it's up to Member States to stop match-fixing and fraud

Rules governing on-line gambling should not be laid down by the EU, as Member States are quite capable of regulating the industry themselves, a majority of MEPs decided in a vote at the Internal Market Committee on Wednesday. A minority of Members disagreed strongly and will submit an alternative report in plenary.

On-line gambling, which is easier to access than traditional gambling, increases the risk of fraud, crime, gambling addiction, dangers to children and threats to the integrity of sports events. However, under the subsidiarity principle, the EU internal market should not be taken as the basis for regulating this industry, says an own-initiative report adopted by the EP Internal Market Committee on Wednesday. Four hundred amendments were tabled to the report by Christel Schaldemose (PES, DK) but the final compromise was approved by 32 votes to 10 with one abstention.

Regulation, cooperation and pre-paid cards

The report as adopted calls on the Council (which represents the Member States) to seek "a potential political solution" to the problems of online and traditional gambling and betting. Studies and proposals, submitted by the Commission at the request of the Council, could identify "common objectives" and a "common position" to enable action to be taken to solve the social and public order problems arising from cross-border on-line gambling such as gambling addiction and misuse of personal data or credit cards.

Joint measures could be envisaged to tackle risks relating to illegal betting behaviour and match-fixing, says the report. It also backs the development of standards for online gambling as regards age limits, a ban on credit and other measures or information to protect vulnerable gamblers such as children and gambling addicts.

Regarding advertising, MEPs believe self-regulation is not enough. Instead they stress the need for both regulation and cooperation between industry and the authorities.

Practical solutions should also be examined for limiting the danger of betting large sums of money. A maximum amount per month that a person can spend on gambling could be laid down or on-line gambling operators could be obliged to make use of pre-paid cards that would be sold in shops, says an amendment tabled by Toine Manders (ALDE, NL).

Gambling and the funding of sport

MEPs are concerned about the deregulation of gambling, which is by far the most important source of income for sports organisations in many Member States. They also note that bets taken by private operators are a form of commercial exploitation of sports events. They recommend that governments protect sporting competitions from any un-

authorised commercial use and take steps to ensure fair financial returns to the benefit of all levels of professional and amateur sport.

Minority opinion

The coordinator of the EPP-ED group, Malcolm Harbour (UK), announced that a minority opinion would be tabled at the plenary vote - scheduled for the session of 9 to 12 March - because of divisions of a mainly national character, especially within his group. He himself had signed or co-signed most of a number of amendments putting the emphasis on compliance with internal market rules and judgments of the Court of Justice, but these were rejected.

The minority in question argues that gambling is an economic activity to which internal market rules should apply, notably freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services, and that non-discriminatory access to national markets for operators who meet the requirements should be guaranteed by Member States under Articles 43 and 49 of the Treaty. It also believes that the dangers of on-line gambling, especially the consequences for consumers such as addiction, are unproven.

According to these same MEPs, rulings of the Court of Justice and the ten infringement proceedings under way against Member States show that measures taken by some Member States do not comply with Community law and that a clarification of national and Community powers is needed.

N.B. :

Procedure: Own-initiative -- Plenary vote: March I, Strasbourg

Contact :

Cezary LEWANOWICZ

Press service

E-mail: imco-press@europarl.europa.eu

BXL: (32-2) 28 44659

PORT: (32) 498 98 35 88