



Parliamentary questions

22 November 2012


E-010686-12

Question for written answer
to the Commission

Rule 117

Cristiana Muscardini (ECR)

► Subject: Free competition for online gambling

 Answer(s)

A case has recently emerged in Belgium in which the government is opposing operators of online gambling sites. Online gambling was legalised in Belgium in 2002 and there are now 239 sites that operate there legally. Nine foreign sites have obtained a licence for Belgian players, while another fifty are operating without a licence and are now on a government blacklist. The latter operators, however, are complaining and invoking alleged EU rules: according to these foreign operators, there must be free competition among the 27 EU Member States for online games too and nobody can lay down protectionist rules to benefit their own operators. The justification given by Belgium for its rules, apparently, is the need to protect its citizens from too many scams and from the danger of becoming gambling addicts. In connection with this case, the head of a giant online gambling company 'Bwin Party' operating in Gibraltar, was even held for questioning for two hours.

1. Has the Commission already adopted its pre-announced communication on online gambling in the internal market?
2. If so, is there any reference to free competition for online gambling?
3. Given the ever increasing volume of such gambling and the exponential growth of gambling addicts, particularly among young people, does the Commission not think it should provide safeguard clauses that restrict freedom of competition in order to avoid the extremely negative impact that gambling can have?

Original language of question: **IT**

OJ C 317 E, 31/10/2013

Last updated: 12 December 2012

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Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission

The Commission has adopted its communication 'Towards a comprehensive European framework for online gambling' on 23 October 2012. The communication and other relevant documents are available on the Commission's website: http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/services/gambling_en.htm.

Member States are in principle free to set the objectives of their policy on games of chance and to define in detail the level of protection sought. They may indeed restrict or limit the supply of all or certain types of online gambling services on the basis of public interest objectives that they seek to protect in relation to gambling. However, the communication also stresses that national regulatory frameworks have to comply with internal market principles and rules.

With the communication the Commission is proposing a comprehensive set of actions and common principles on consumer protection. These measures aim in particular at a better protection of young people. The Commission is *inter alia* encouraging the development of better age-verification tools and online content filters. It is also pushing for more responsible advertising and increased parental awareness of the dangers associated with gambling.

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