



Malta to regularise gaming law

by Chris Galea - cgal@di-ve.com
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Malta will be removing the barrier prohibiting foreign operators in the online gaming industry from working in Malta from its law, even though the restriction was never applied in practice.

Speaking to www.di-ve.com, Lotteries and Gaming Authority (LGA) CEO Mario Galea said that the legal notice – which is expected to be published shortly – would be regularising what the country has been doing in practice throughout the years.

He highlighted the importance of the amendment, pointing out that this legal detail was being used against Malta by other EU member states which were still trying to hold on to their state lottery and gambling monopolies.

Mr Galea explained that the regulations introduced by Malta in 2004 challenged the last remaining monopoly in the EU – the lotteries and gaming industry – but several states were not keen to give this up and were trying to use the legal detail in their argument against Malta's stand.

"We were the first country in the EU to introduce the remote gaming regulations. These triggered the EU policy-makers to consider whether monopolies in the lotteries and gaming industry were really necessary," he said.

"Nowadays, everybody has realised that e-gaming is here to stay. We must therefore ensure that there is a good policy, even with regards to cross-border gaming," Mr Galea added.

In Malta's view, he explained, such a policy means that the regulator acts as a guardian to ensure that gaming is fair and transparent, that minors and vulnerable players are protected, and that gaming is kept free from corruption, money-laundering and collusion.

Mr Galea said it was important to maintain a balance between the two poles of economic profit and consumer protection, as the two extremes would lead either to monopoly or to prohibition, with the latter case eventually leading to abuse.

The CEO further told www.di-ve.com that Malta's model proved to be a success even when it was transposed to the online gaming, with the country achieving a very respectable status as a reputable jurisdiction.

"Since 2004, we had over 450 requests for licences. Of these, around 250 were approved while approximately 130 were still at the application stage. The rest were either cancelled or the companies voluntarily wound up after realising the legal framework was too tough for them."

The industry is also generating high-end jobs in line with the national policy for ICT, with almost 1,850 workers currently employed locally. Even though Mr Galea acknowledged some of these were foreigners, he pointed out that they were living in Malta and thus were contributing to the Maltese economy.

As part of its efforts to maintain the reputation Malta achieved in the industry, the government is currently in the process of reviewing the 2004 regulations, both in the administrative and functional aspects.

Mr Galea said that the reviewed regulations should be in place by 2009, in time for the renewal of the licences issued in 2004.



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