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Q & A: Tjeerd Veenstra, De Lotto

by Rob van der Gaast

The architect who last week convinced the EU Members of Parliament (MEP) to keep the Internet gambling and the so-called "country of origin" principle out of the EU service directive is Tjeerd Veenstra. The director of Netherlands-based De Lotto has already earned his marks by winning a streak of court cases, keeping out other foreign Internet betting operators in the Netherlands.

Veenstra is member of the board of the European Lotteries (EL), chairman of the EL legal affairs working group and member of the Strategy Committee. Above that he is the legal spokesman.

Born in 1948, Veenstra studied social sciences at the University of Nijmegen. He has practiced as a psychotherapist and has held senior management posts in the healthcare sector. Since 1994 he has been the executive director of De Lotto, which had a turnover in 2005 of 275 million euro.

In this interview, he reveals his winning strategy and more.

IGN: The "front" of the Internet operators, including the special interest groups EBA and RGA, made it very easy for you and the EL.

Tjeerd Veenstra: I must admit that at a very late moment we eventually got the idea that there was at least some coordination in the political approach of our opponents. Of course, I do understand their specific position. They are first of all competitors. I have sometimes the feeling that they are more focused on a competition to the bottom with each other about their (future) market share in the liberalized European gambling market. They forget, however, to explain to European citizens why they should shift to another system, what the real benefits are of a liberalization of the gambling services in Europe versus the present restrictive system. But I understand that. I would not know how to explain that either.

IGN: What was your successful strategy?

TV: We have consequently focused on the obvious benefits of our work as lottery operators. MEPs understand that Europe is more than economics alone. European society benefits from what we are doing. MEPs see in their home country very easily what the positive impact is of that.

IGN: Did you use external companies for the lobbying?

TV: We have been (recently) advised by Blueprint partners. Furthermore, we have been advised by our legal advisors Vlaemminck & Partners. The Strategy and Coordination Committee of EL (president, vice president and myself) together with our external



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advisors and the valuable contribution of several EL members proved to be a strong team.

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IGN: And the next phase is approval by the European Commission and EU member states.

TV: We know that we have won a battle, but the war is not over.

IGN: How long will it take to overcome this hurdle?

TV: We have to fight at two fronts: political and legal. Taking into account the normal administrative procedures and time frames, it will take at least two years before it will settle down. So it will require a lot of our attention and energy, but we are prepared for that.

IGN: After the voting, there was little to no press concerning the implications for Internet gambling.

TV: You are right, but I had several interviews before the voting. Maybe it was no news at all that the gambling services would be excluded. I am absolutely sure that it would have been something else if the gambling services would have been included.

IGN: Some insiders still think the commission will conjure a rabbit out of a top hat.

TV: You underestimate our early warning system.

IGN: And in the meantime, court cases and infringements pop up like mushrooms.

TV: That is correct. Despite the fact that until now several Supreme Courts have given a positive outcome (for us), it is always possible that something occurs. We do not control the courts in 25 member states.

IGN: But when the rich Internet operators take it seriously, anything is still possible.

TV: No, I am positive about our position. The longer and more intensive the battle will go on, the more the leading question will come in the limelight: Is Europe really better off with a liberalization of the gambling services? And then governments will remember again what they have already been doing for centuries: controlling gambling services. And then after a quiet decade, some new EU commissioner will again bring up a brilliant idea. . . .

IGN: Lobbying is associated with parties, lunches, dinners and bars. Did you take a lot of extra weight?

TV: I know the customs of Brussels, but I must say that we were and are extremely moderate. We know the organizations and persons we have to talk with very well. And we have to do it very efficiently. We

are not professional lobbyists, but volunteers with a mission. And (we have) limited time because we have to combine it with our responsibilities at home. So we prefer to come straight to the subject. And that was until now not so unsuccessful, was it?

IGN: What does it cost, and who is paying the bill?

TV: We have made arrangements in our normal budget, which is quite moderate. And we did not ask any additional payments at all. This has mainly to do with the volunteers among our members who were eager to do the job.

About the Author

Rob van der Gaast has a background in sports journalism. He worked for over seven years as the head of sports for Dutch National Radio and has developed new concepts for the TV and the gambling industry. Now he operates from Istanbul as an independent gambling research analyst. He specializes in European gambling matters and in privatizations of gambling operators. Rob has contributed to IGN since Jul 09, 2001.