

Table games stimulation called into question

Table games are still suffering downturns of gross gaming profit (GGP) for tax year 2005-2006, according to fresh news from Union of French casinos. GGP stands at 166 millions euros, with effectiveness of stamp duty abolition as from May 1st, when figures reached 172 millions euros the year before.

Gaming facilities mix, made possible on November 1st, combined with identity checks on entrance and forthcoming poker games could lead, as the union hopes, to "a renewed interest for traditional games". This topic is high up in the responsible gaming agreement, ratified in the beginning of the year by employers' syndicates and Nicolas Sarkozy ; at the time speaking of "a dynamic urging to support table games and more generally casino activity".

Paradoxically, the order following decree last December 13th and replacing order December 23th, 1959, currently under discussion between the Ministry of Interior and both employers' unions, makes provision for anti-productive measures likely to reduce casinos' table games offer.

Which deeply worries trade unions for casino employees, standing before the opportunity for establishments with 1 to 50 slot machines to have a single table game, for 51-200 machines, two table games, and over 100, three table games ; and flexible hours of work (1.800/year minimum) introducing seasonality of traditional games.

In accordance to a study made by the Journal of Casinos, 55 French establishments offer 20 to 50 slot machines. 52 of them propose a ball or ball 2000 and 27 out of the group also have traditional games, from one to six, with most of the time an English roulette and a Black Jack. The forthcoming order will

allow to propose only the ball, and even remove it, for higher number of slot machines. In that perspective, casinos will be able to remove one or more gaming tables.

There are 120 casinos with 51 to 200 slot machines. 22 have already removed the ball from their gaming facilities. 13 only propose the ball and will whether add another game or remove the ball and open two gaming tables, for example an English roulette and a Black Jack. At last, 17 casinos offer over 201 machines, among which three chose to overlook the ball (Cannes-Croisette, Enghein and Divonne).

Two casinos do not have slot machines : Toulouse, awaiting its final establishment on Cépière Island and Trinité-sur-Mer, that can only offer a ball 2000 since HGC refuses to grant permission to operate with slot machines.

Over the 47 establishments owned by Partouche, 12 have 50 or less machines, with four offering the ball and others at least two table games. 29 have 51 to 200 machines, with nine without the ball and three with only the ball. 6 casinos have more than 200 machines and propose 4 to 6 table games.

The 32 Lucien Barrière establishments (except for Toulouse) have more than 50 slot machines with 8 over 200 machines. They propose two to six traditional games. Five casinos no longer offer the ball. The third French casino group, Moliflor Loisirs, has six establishments under 50 slot machines, with two also proposing table games. The 14 others have between 51 and 200 slots, among which three have no ball and one only offers this game.

Among the 16 casinos of Tranchant group, three propose less than 50 machines, two offer only a ball in addition while the third establishment (Saint-Gervais les Bains) offers a wider range of traditional games. All 12 casinos having between 51 and 200 slot machines, offer both the ball and table games. A single casino (Amnéville) totalises more than 201 machines,

adding to its facilities three table games.

There is no proportionality linking table games with the size of the group. This way, Arev Finance, that only has six establishments with five offering 20 to 30 machines, and the last one 65, still proposes two table games in addition to the ball in four of them. Chaudes-Aigues even offers ball, English roulette, Black Jack and stud poker for 30 slot machines.

Cogit group with four casinos under 50 slot machines and the same between 51 and 200, offers table games in five casinos for removal of the ball. Emeraude group has a single casino under 50 machines, the seven others are under 200. Each of them has a ball and five propose at least two table games.

Tahoe with its four establishments (49 to 150 slot machines) offers the ball and two to four table games. Viking Casinos, offers in five of its six casinos, the ball, English roulette and Black Jack. The sixth (Houlgate) has 50 slot machines and a ball. Finally, concerning independent casinos, 30 over 46 propose traditional games. Four have removed their ball for more attractive table games.

For several important groups, such as Lucien Barrière, the time has come to reduce the number of gaming tables and employees. Dominique Deseigne has been saying that table games are a negative post. According to him, the arrival of new players at the roulette and the Black Jack does not "changes management". She has already engaged procedures against communes to review terms of cession of a casino, among others Cannes, where establishments of Lucien Barrière are losing money.

Le Borgne, general manager of Viking Casinos group, underlined that "table games will obviously develop themselves" if we set them up on a more playful ground, like in Bussang, which opened recently. "It is not normal that they contribute for only 3 to 4% of the GGP, while they reach 20 to 30% in other

countries”.

For one type of English roulette in Bussang, chips cost 0.5 euro. Which seems enough to attract new players. In fact, Le Borgne is convinced that using teaching skills is the best way to get more players around gaming tables and raise the sector's GGP. He also thinks electronic English roulette could have this power, by encouraging novices to have a first experience before moving to real gaming tables.