

French casino group loses licence battle

The Council of State has turned down a request from French casino group CFR for an operating licence in the Netherlands, ending a long-running legal process. The decision means that state-owned Holland Casino remains the only company licensed to run casinos in the country.

The Council ruled that even though its refusal was an infringement of EU laws, it was in the public interest. 'The Netherlands has deliberately opted for a single licence holder in its desire to protect the consumer, combat illegality and criminality, and reduce gambling,' the Council's spokeswoman Sabine Heijstek told BNR radio.

Today's ruling overturns the decision of a lower court in 2005 which said the state had failed to prove the need for a monopoly.

The only way now open for CFR is to pursue the matter through the European legal system. The European Commission has already said it is concerned that Holland's refusal to let foreign companies set up casinos may be breaking competition law.

CFR had applied for a licence to operate a casino in Bergen op Zoom. Meanwhile US gambling group Harrah's – which operates Caesars Palace in Las Vegas – has applied to build a mega casino and leisure complex in Maastricht.

Holland Casino operates 14 casinos nationwide and generated EUR 114m for the treasury in 2006.