

# Belgium Looks For Early Online Gambling Launch In 2012

Backed up by a new government, the Belgian gambling regulator plans to issue online casino, gaming and betting licences by March as it looks to atone for the delays of 2011.

The Belgian Gaming Commission said it expected to issue between 10-20 online gambling licences in the coming months and will use a blacklist to block out any illegal providers.

Belgium's record-breaking 541 days without a government left the regulator powerless to pass crucial decrees and fully launch its new online gambling market.

But with Elio Di Rupo sworn in as Prime Minister last month, and Belgian banks and ISPs [agreeing to prohibit illegal operators](#), the regulator is keen to move swiftly.

Etienne Marique, president of the gaming commission, has [promised](#) that where 2011 was limited to evaluating online operators, 2012 will be the year for real changes.

The regulator plans to issue internet casino and poker licences in February followed by online betting and gaming arcade licences in March.

As for enforcement, the gaming commission's legal counsel, Peter Naessens, explained: "There will be no blacklist handed over to banks or ISPs as long as there is no licensed market."

It is understood that the commission will avoid a blacklist with thousands of illegal websites like that used by Italian regulator AAMS.

Belgian gaming lawyer Pieter Paepe said that February and March were the key dates to watch out for this year: "Then we will see who gets the licences and I suppose once the blacklist is issued there will be some litigation about the legality of the Belgian market."

Some of Europe's largest online gambling firms, including Bwin.Party, have refused to apply for a licence as they insist Belgium's gambling act is not in line with European Union law.

In the meantime, poker giant PokerStars and French casino firm Partouche have entered the market.

Just last month the gaming commission included both operators [on a list of nine](#) Belgian websites with temporary licences, which also featured Casino 770, Circus, GPwin, Wimigames and Magicdice.

On the list as well were two betting sites — Belgium's PMU and Betfirst, linked to national newspaper La Derniere Heure.

Paepe warned, though, that the temporary authorisation of the nine sites was problematic: "It's a practical solution but it also gives them a big competitive advantage over websites which aren't authorised yet."

Belgium's gaming commission was allowed to offer A +, B + and F + online gambling licences from [January 1 last year](#) but struggled amid the country's political deadlock.

Last month, wearing his trademark red bow tie, Elio Di Rupo was sworn in along with his 12 cabinet ministers and six secretaries of state to replace the caretaker administration in place since April 2010.

"Now we have a government with full powers so it's much easier for them to pass royal decrees. Without the decrees the gaming legislation is an empty box," Paepe said.

A code of ethics for the new gambling market is due to be signed off by politicians in the first half of this year, followed by a set of technical standards in the second half.

The Belgian online gambling model continues to stir up controversy in the EU for making online licences only available to companies with a land-based presence.

Online gambling operators have already complained to the European Commission and have threatened to challenge it again in front of Europe's highest authorities.

The land-based requirement will limit the number of A + online casino licences to nine, B + online gaming arcade licences to 180 and F + internet betting licences to 34.