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THE METHODS ARE CHANGING WHILE THE MISSION OF THE EL TO SERVE ITS MEMBERS REMAINS THE SAME

PGRI INTRODUCTION: The European Lotteries is the umbrella organisation of national lotteries operating games of chance for the public benefit. EL brings together state-owned and private operators, both profit and non-profit, who operate on behalf of the state, and only in jurisdictions where they are properly licensed. Its mission is to promote the sound and sustainable gaming model for the benefit of society that is based on the values of subsidiarity, precaution, solidarity and integrity. The organisation is a proactive and strategic forum for reflection and discussion between its members and a true laboratory for the design, implementation, and further development and architecture of the EL operator model; and to promote the cooperation between its members by providing them with the platforms for exchange, educational offerings, industry data, information and sound support.

And Arjan announces EL Congress 2021 in Croatia. Fabulous – We can't wait to see everyone there!

Paul Jason: How has the pandemic impacted EL and how the Association continues to serve its members?

Arjan van't Veer: At this moment, I have been working from my home in the Netherlands for over five months. The Covid-19 pandemic hit Europe in early March of this year and, like many of the EL Members, we decided that the staff of EL would work from home as well. Luckily they are all still safe. Now, at the end of the summer, we are confronted with new and fast growing

numbers of cases. New restrictions are in place in many countries. It is impossible to predict where this will bring us.

The EL Executive Committee decided in March that the work of the association should continue, no matter the pandemic. We therefore still monitor and contribute to the relevant dossiers that are passing in the European institutions. Important dossiers such as the Digital Services Act, the Anti Money Laundering action plan, the CEN/Cenelec standard on reporting

on online gaming are closely monitored and worked on together with the EL Working Groups. In our contributions to these consultations of the EU institutions, we constantly stress the importance of a national, individual approach towards the regulation of gambling in Europe. That safeguards the interests of the players at best and, as a result, it is the basis for a sustainable model where the revenues are used for the benefit of society.

The important role that lotteries play in society was also the topic of a very special online event that EL organized. This extraordinary webinar was organized under the sponsorship of the Croatian presidency and focused on the role that national lotteries perform for the benefit of society in general as well as during the pandemic.

A. van't Veer: By granting its support, the Presidency clearly recognised the important role of lotteries in society. EL is active not only on the EU playing field. Where needed, the association helps its Members at the national level by putting forward views and facts on various regulatory debates. EL can readily provide examples on regulatory developments in other (EU) countries. That can inform and guide politicians and regulators.

EL has some 70 Member Lotteries, spread over the greater Europe, from Iceland to Israel. The association was created in 1983. Some of the world's largest Lotteries are prominent and important Members (FDJ, Lottomatica, OPAP, SELAE) as well as some of the world's oldest ones (Dutch Staatsloterij -now Nederlandse Loterij- founded in 1726 and Portugal's Jogos Santa Casa founded in 1784). Total sales of the EL Members was in 2018 some 92 billion euros, of which 20 billion euros was returned to society.

EL Educational Seminars have always been such a valuable part of your service. How do you envision the future of these programs?

A. van't Veer: At the start of the pandemic, it was clear that we could not organize physical seminars as we were used to doing. We turned several of them into online activities. And unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we had to cancel our bi-annual Industry Days that were planned this year in Manchester. Together with Camelot, our host for this event, and the EL partners IGT, Intralot and Scientific Games, we concluded that due to the difficult circumstances, we should cancel this meeting. I took the initiative to launch an EL E-learning platform for our Members, free of charge. In only a few days we were able to launch the platform and in a first phase, we offer, in 4 languages, general modules on personal effectiveness and skills. After the summer we will bring new, lottery-related modules to this platform, for example on CSR. A third phase will bring business school related modules. I do see the role for educational activities of EL as vital and that ongoing development contributes to a strong, sustainable lottery model. Exchange of best practices and learning opportunities will enable the EL Members to further innovate and stay ahead of the competition from illegal operators. EL has one of the best frameworks on Responsible Gaming in the gambling sector. EL supported its Members to become certified, and will continue to do so. By doing so and by investing time and money, we are able to certify all EL Members in a few years' time. Service is key for an association as EL.

I introduced two years ago the EL Corporate University, that reaches out to new Lottery employees as well as executive management. Together with EL honorary president Ray Bates, we offer unmatched education programmes on all aspects of our sector. These modules will now be transferred to a virtual Corporate University environment that is unique to the lottery world. I see this as an important example of how we are able as an association to adapt to the new reality and create value for our Members. Although we do of course miss very much the times to personally visit and interact with our Members.

EL is turning itself more and more into a service oriented association. That means that we will continue to invest in more

and valued services to our Members. EL will bring these services, data, and initiatives that an individual Lottery Member can't readily do – especially now, in a time where the Covid-19 pandemic also hits on the Lotteries' budgets. The lockdowns and other ongoing measures do have an impact on the ability of the Lotteries to conduct studies or do innovations. EL can step in and help out. We are developing a database of studies on relevant gambling related topics. Often important national studies are not shared now, so we will make the findings and outcomes available to our Members. Another example is a study that EL conducted on the Socio Economic Contribution of Lotteries in Europe. We will commission a study on the topic of a risk-based approach towards gambling advertisements, to be able to answer with facts based on today's developments. Too often now, we see strict advertisement bans for all types of gambling. A risk-based approach is really needed to protect players as well as a basis for a sustainable lottery model. The EL website will also be renewed. A website is an interesting hub to inform interested stakeholders as well as the EL Members. Our new website will be state-of-art and will have many new and interesting features.

I want to thank EL Members, all of whom are very much involved in helping and caring. We monitored, over a three month period, what happened and how the EL Members responded to the pandemic. And where they were hit by the lockdowns, we also saw that many lotteries helped out in those difficult times, exactly as they have been doing for many years. Several Lotteries made their staff and also their company cars available to hospitals. They provided masks for free. And not to forget, they stood beside the points-of-sale to help them with hygiene measures, financial arrangements and other important support. It showed immediately how dedicated Lotteries are. From our monitoring we saw also the developments into new forms of gambling such as betting on E-sports as regular sport activities were limited. Via our sister association GLMS (the Global Lottery Monitoring System), we were able to identify irregularities in sports activities to avoid match fixing and betting problems. Unfortunately we saw also some regulators that took very strict measures and did not allow some of our Members to offer their games. One can imagine that illegal gambling, both online and offline, grew under those regimes.

How do you plan for the future when we don't know how external circumstances and conditions will evolve?

A. van't Veer: I believe that the Lotteries adapted to the "new normal" in a professional way. All our Members were, where they were allowed to do so, able to continue securely offering their games and draws. Outsiders from our sector can hardly imagine how complicated that was. Business continuity plans, operational risk management procedures and dedicated staff proved quite capable of dealing with this unprecedented situation. EL shared best practices on these themes to further assist its Members in this. Our Operational Risk and Assurance Working Group was of great help to us. I think that all EL Members learned from the players that enjoyed their secure online games during the lockdowns. These learnings will be important in the further developments towards an omnichannel approach, in which offline and online sales channels will meld into a general, service orientated channel. Although I do not believe that in this new normal every player goes online for his or her games. They will continue to like the personal approach of their local retailer.

In what ways will the methods of operation, services provided by EL, be more permanently changed or impacted by the current crises? Of course, none of us really knows for sure how the future will re-shape our business models, but what are your plans for positioning EL for long-term adaptation to whatever the "new normal" ends up looking like?

A. van't Veer: These are clearly uncertain and troubling times. Nevertheless, I do have a positive outlook for the role and the activities of EL. The sustainable way forward for lotteries, also based on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, will be at the core of EL's Congress 2021 we are now preparing. The Croatian Lottery will be our host for this event, where we hopefully can meet in person again. It will probably be under 'a new normal' whatever that may be, in a year from now. We are working on this event, again in the best hope of being able to meet physically. We will keep an eye on the developments and where and when needed we will adapt. We will keep you informed and look forward to seeing you there! ■