

SOUTHERN EUROPE SEES GROWING AMOUNT OF CASINOS



In France, Spain, and Cyprus, casino projects are multiplying. This means the competition is also multiplying - more projects with less money and less planning. Confronted with the crisis, Southern Europe thinks of itself as the new Las Vegas, and in turn many new casino projects are cropping up. It is becoming a real epidemic.

On June 17, 2013, Marseille's council validated the implementation of a casino in a city that so far has none. Located on the seafront, close to the new "Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée", the facility, which at best will open in 2017, would get an annual advance of around EUR10,000,000.

Further west, Jean-Loup Calini, Vice President of the CCI of Nîmes, has ambitions to build the biggest amusement park in France. **It aims to be able to attract more than 30 million tourists per year, almost double the figure that Disneyland can.**

The idea, presented in May 2013 - codenamed Frenchvallée - envisages building 30 casino-hotels in the Gard department, on a yet unidentified site. The complex would include copies of the Eiffel Tower, Mont-Saint-Michel, famous castles, and former cruise liners. International investors estimate the cost of the project to be around EUR 16,000,000,000.

Further south, the crisis in Spain also wants to hit the jackpot. Part of the U.S. group Las Vegas Sands, the EuroVegas project involves the construction of six casinos and twelve hotels in Alcorcon, in Madrid's suburbs.

Approved in September 2012, the project, worth an estimated EUR 17,000,000, is expecting at least 200,000 members in the first term. The complex, which includes a copy of Times Square and the Twin Towers, is due to open in 2017, but the work will drag on until 2031.

At the other end of the Mediterranean, the Cypriot government gave a building permit for the first casino on the southern part of the island in July. The Turkish side already has 31 casinos.

Far from unanimous, these projects generate strong opinions. The Orthodox Church of Cyprus obtained the prohibition of gambling when the independence of the island was agreed. The church still remains fiercely opposed to the opening of casinos and gambling areas.

In Spain, the EuroVegas project, created in February 2012, has had multiple protests against its construction as it would bring multiple problems commonly associated with casinos to the area (money laundering, prostitution etc.). However, EuroVegas has disputed the relevance of these problems to these casinos and has said that the benefits largely outweigh all disadvantages.

In France, the Frenchvallée project, still in its infancy, has already appeared in the sights of activists opposed to the GPII or major development programs like the Notre-Dame-des-Landes airport or the Lyon-Turin railway line that some critics deem "unnecessary and imposed".

In this struggle between casinos and critics, the crisis is an advantage for the former. This

is due to the economic importance of tourism and how, under its influence, all the countries of Southern Europe continue to grow. For example, the sector now accounts for 15.2% of the Spanish GDP, a rise from 11% before the crisis.

More ironically, sociologist Jean-Pierre Martignoni explains that "the poorer you are, the more you play. Several studies have shown a correlation between falling incomes and a rise in playing the game."

The debate over whether or not the opening of new casinos has an effect on tourism in Southern Europe has only just begun.

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