

## Sportingbet staff detained in Turkey

Contributed by Simon Kennedy  
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### Online gambling firm scales-back reliance on Turkish operations

New York -- U.K. online gambling group Sportingbet said Thursday that two of its employees and a number of other people linked to its business have been detained in Turkey, nearly two years after its then-chairman was arrested in the U.S.

The company said it hasn't been told what's going on by Turkish authorities, but noted those held include two of its U.K.-based staff, who are Turkish nationals and were in the country on holiday. In addition, Turkish authorities have detained a number of people linked to Maslin Properties, Sportingbet's (UK:SBT) former marketing partner in the region.

Shares in the group dropped 5.8% to 36 pence in afternoon London trading, extending the stock's losses to more than 30% for the year. The stock was trading at around 450 pence a share two years ago, before a crackdown in the U.S. forced the firm to stop taking bets there, sending its shares tumbling.

Sportingbet, which offers sports and casino betting as well as an online poker room, said Thursday that it has been gradually reducing its reliance on the Turkish market in the last few months "in order to build a more balanced geographic risk profile for the business."

The company said its Superbahis unit in Turkey generated 14% of the group's net gaming revenue in the third quarter ended April 30, compared to 26% in the fiscal second quarter.

Sportingbet added it is continuing to operate in Turkey and remains confident of meeting market expectations for the fourth quarter and year ending July 31. Turkey has become an increasingly difficult place for online gambling firms to do business since the country introduced tougher restrictions on both domestic and foreign gambling companies early last year. Those changes have already led Neteller (UK:NLR), an online payments systems popular with gambling site customers, to halt transactions with gambling sites in Turkey.

### International crackdown

The biggest crackdown on online gambling has come in the U.S.

Sportingbet's then Chairman, Peter Dicks, was arrested at John F. Kennedy Airport in September 2006, two months after the detention of David Carruthers, CEO of BetOnSports.

Dicks was later released, but the arrests were swiftly followed by the surprise passing of new anti-gambling legislation, which pushed Sportingbet and rivals including PartyGaming (UK:PRTY) and 888 Holdings (UK:888) out of the region.

Since the U.S. legislation was introduced there have been fears about crackdowns in other countries, including France, where authorities interviewed the former CEO of 888 Holdings, John Anderson, in February last year. That came five months after French police arrested the two founders of Austrian gambling group Bwin (DE:936172) over its sponsorship deal with Monaco's soccer club.