



## Villarroya leads call for Italian reforms

**SEGA'S international sales manager Maria Carmen Villarroya has called upon the Italian authorities to reform regulations she claimed are damaging the country's amusement industry.**

During a panel discussion organised by trade association SAPAR at the ENADA Spring show in Rimini, leading industry figures urged the government to enact new regulations for video games separate to anything in place that groups such machines together with gambling devices.

"Sega has been developing games since the 1970s and Italy has been one of the major markets for us for many years," Villarroya said. "However, all of us here share a common concern and that is the weakened state of the pure amusement machine sector in Italy. It is clear for all to see that the amusement machine sector in Italy has been neglected by the relevant authorities."

The position of the country's amusement operators and machine manufacturers has been "completely ignored," she said.

Technology has now evolved, but the decree that regulates the sector has not. Consumer and PC games can now be played online and mobile games are freely available in Italy, but such technology is not allowed to be used in the coin-operated video games market.

"This industry has proved time after time that we welcome and embrace fair competition with open arms but unfair competition is something that should not be acceptable to anyone, especially when it is caused by government regulations that are simply uneasy to change," she asserted. "Neither the Italian authorities, nor we as an industry, should be expected to simply sit back and accept the situation as the status quo."

She called upon the authorities to "address the evident imbalance" by reviewing and making more flexible the existing Comma 7c regulations in order to help the industry to compete and to promote growth.

"With the restrictions imposed in Comma 7c, Italy is the only country in the world where game developers have been forced to modify the software of games to meet the requirements of the decree, which is costly, time consuming and, I dare say, pointless. The actual decree leaves no room for new technologies or innovation within the gameplay itself.

"The restrictions within the decree mean ultimately there is less choice for Italian operators, which severely restricts the operator in his ability to compete in a fast-moving, ever-changing and unfairly competitive leisure market.

"We believe it is essential that the Italian government takes immediate steps to reform Comma 7c to enable domestic machine operators, exhibitors and manufacturers to have a future and continue to provide employment for many throughout the 21st century and beyond."

## A manifesto for change

**ON the second day of the ENADA show in Rimini, trade association SAPAR brought together a group of leading international amusement suppliers to discuss the key issues facing the sector in Italy.**

The aim, ultimately, is to present a set of principles – a manifesto – to the regulating authorities in the hope that common sense will prevail and new amusements-specific legislation will be drawn up.

Raffaele Curcio, chairman of SAPAR, argued that amusement machines – Comma 7 – have been neglected by Italy's lawmakers in favour of addressing games with cash prizes instead. However, with in excess of 100,000 amusement machines in the country, this sector "is not to be discounted altogether." In fact, he said, the business makes a considerable contribution to the treasury's coffers.

Among the topics discussed by the panel, comprising Steven Tan of UNIS, Maria Carmen

Villarroya of Sega, Raw Thrills' Mark Struhs and Stern Pinball founder Gary Stern, two emerged as key concerns. These were the seemingly unjustifiable homologation process for game approvals and the lumping together of gambling and amusements when it comes to legislation.

Discussing the lengthy homologation demands of the Italian regulators, Struhs described it as "costly."

"It's a process that really slows down our entry into this market and in a fiercely competitive global business, that is not good for us," he said.

Back on the show floor, Mauro Zaccaria, who heads up TecnoPlay, one of the country's leading equipment distributors, said he hoped new legislation would recognise amusements as a "family business."

"This is not gambling," he said. "The common term for these products is 'family games' – that's completely different to gambling."

## Italy can learn from China, says Tan

**STEVEN Tan, general manager of amusement equipment manufacturer UNIS, has suggested that the process of modernising China's amusement regulations could offer a solution for the struggling Italian market.**

Two years ago, he explained, the Chinese industry went through a stage where the government officials sought to clarify and modernise the regulatory framework of the industry. "But first, he said, "they wanted to understand the industry."

Through the Chinese amusement association, UNIS and its fellow members invited government officials to the IAAPA Attractions Show in Orlando, US, to expose them to the kind of games now available. Licensed titles, such as Raw Thrills' Fast and Furious and Bandai Namco's Star Wars demonstrate how this industry connects to others, such as the film and mobile industries, Tan explained.

"Our purpose was to show that we are the out-of-home experience; we want to bring families to entertainment centres, we want to give the chance to experience these games out of home."

The Chinese government has now taken steps that regulate the sector and recognise it as a cultural experience, he added.

"In my mind, what we have done in China is pave the way for a healthy industry for decades and decades to come," Tan said. "We have been successful because we took the effort to show the government what the industry is really about."



Steven Tan (right) discusses China's experience with regulation

China's experience in recent years provides lessons for the Italian amusement industry, Tan said.

"I travel extensively and my colleagues and I have never seen a country where it is so misunderstood, because we feel we are very unfairly linked together to the gaming industry. What we did in China was go through a phase that is not different to what Italy is going through right now, but we feel we have been successful by showing the government what a healthy industry should look like."