

Ndrangheta's digital front: exposing Talenta Labs as a tool for systemic mafia money laundering



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The case of Talenta Labs stands out as a rare example of a small IT firm, with a statutory capital of just €50,000, unexpectedly ending up at the center of an international money-laundering investigation.

On paper, Talenta Labs is a software developer for online casinos. However, as a result of the investigation, it turned out that it is a link in a chain where investment funds, defendants in criminal cases, and the shadows of the Calabrian mafia Ndrangheta intersect.

As in most cases, journalists were the first to notice the unusual processes happening around Talenta Labs. And only after the OCCRP project released its investigation into the penetration of criminal capital into the European gambling business did the Italian prosecutor's office pay attention to the company.

Why Talenta Labs attracted attention

Talenta Labs first came into OCCRP's view in 2019. The investigators' attention was drawn to the 2017 deal when the Dutch fund Ramphastos Investments acquired 80% of the company. Formally, it was a standard acquisition of an IT developer to strengthen positions in the online gambling market. But it soon became clear that the deal was connected to a broader network of assets in the gambling industry, involving persons already under investigation. Moreover, the source of part of the investments raised questions.

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According to the OCCRP investigation, the purchase of Talenta was not an isolated deal but part of a series of acquisitions, including the operator SKS365, whose founders were also suspected of ties to the mafia.

As previously reported by OCCRP, the Investigative Reporting Project in Italy (IRPI) and De Groene Amsterdammer, the Talenta deal was preceded by the fund's purchase of a different gambling operator, SKS365, for 158 million euros (US\$173 million). That company's four founders, including its former head, Paolo Tavarelli, were accused of building the business with the help of mafia money and connections. They are now awaiting trial.

After the OCCRP investigation was published, law enforcement agencies took up the company. The Italian prosecutor's office, particularly the office in Reggio Calabria, viewed Talenta Labs not as the primary object of the crime but as a tool. The main claims boil down to three blocks: money laundering through purchase; ties to Ndrangheta and the presence of hidden beneficiaries.

The investigation believes that around 2.5 million euros used in the acquisition of Talenta may have come from criminal activities. One of the company's co-owners, Massimiliano Rizzo, was convicted for illegal gambling business and, according to prosecutors, acted as a contact person for Ndrangheta boss Rocco Femmia.

The investigation also claimed that Talenta has a hidden ownership structure, including interests of persons not formally listed in the documents. In particular, it



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