

Group of Independent Sport Experts

Report on EU priorities in the field of sport

Introduction

The new EU competence on sport included in Article 165 TFEU has triggered high expectations from Member State Governments, the sport movement and other stakeholders. The role of the European Commission is to develop concrete policy options in view of these expectations. In order to obtain input regarding strategic choices for the implementation of the new EU competence in the field of sport, the Commission is carrying out a broad consultation process. In addition to consultations with institutional stakeholders and the general public, Commissioner Vassiliou wished to seek also the views of a number of independent experts with proven experience in the area of sport and EU integration. A Group of Independent Sport Experts was thus set up in order to provide independent added value to the overall consultation process. The attached Report summarises the debates in the Group and its conclusions and recommendations.

Composition and working method of the Group

The Group of Independent Sport Experts (hereinafter: "the Group") included the following participants:

- Mr Manolis Mavrommatis
- Ms Raija Mattila
- Ms Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel
- Mr Thierry Zintz
- Mr Richard Parrish
- Mr Stefan Szymanski
- Ms Claudia Bokel
- Ms Theresa Zabell
- Mr Jean-Michel Oppert
- Mr Pietro Paolo Mennea

The Commission fulfilled the role of a Secretariat to the Group. It was represented by the following participants:

- Mr Pierre Mairesse, Director for Youth and Sport
- Mr Michal Krejza, Head of the Sport Unit and chairman of the Group
- Mr Pedro Velázquez, Deputy Head of the Sport Unit
- Mr Martin Šimčík, Sport Unit
- Ms Andrea Greis, Sport Unit.

The Group held its first meeting on 28 April 2010. Six experts attended the first meeting. Non-participating experts undertook to submit their written contributions upon receiving the

draft report. The experts present at the first meeting agreed that Mr Mavrommatis would be the Group's rapporteur, with support from the Secretariat.

The discussion at the first meeting was conducted on the basis of a background document tabled by the Commission. It was agreed that the rapporteur would produce a draft report on the basis of this discussion, which would be discussed at the second meeting. Following this second debate the resulting document would be transmitted to Commissioner Vassiliou.

The Group held its second and final meeting on 14 June 2010. Seven experts took part in this meeting and the draft report of the rapporteur was discussed in detail. The three experts who could not attend the meeting sent their written contributions. The Secretariat included the various comments in a draft Final Report which was distributed to the experts for final remarks and amendments.

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Final Report

Rapporteur: Mr Manolis Mavrommatis

The White Paper on Sport, adopted in 2007 by the European Commission, constitutes a landmark for sport in the European Union. This was confirmed by the European Parliament when the report on the White Paper on Sport was voted on 8 May 2008 by an overwhelming majority of members. The challenge is now to further develop actions begun in the context of the White Paper on the basis of the new EU competence for sport, enshrined in Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), while respecting the principles of subsidiarity and of autonomy of the sport movement.

The group of Independent Sport Experts (hereinafter referred to as “the Group”) set out the objectives of its actions as follows:

- Identify priorities for the implementation of the EU's new powers in the field of sport;
- Assess objectives and priorities identified by the European Commission and other partners in the course of the current consultation process;
- Identify a limited number of priority areas for an initial EU funding programme in the field of sport.

Before making any proposals based on the Treaty’s text on sport, the Group would like to draw attention to some more general issues which could be usefully taken into account by the Commission when drafting the Communication and the Programme on sport:

- Sport is not only a means of achieving goals in relevant policy areas (health, social inclusion, education, employment, environment etc.), but it also has an inherent value. The most important feature of sport is still the happiness and joy it brings people, thus contributing significantly to the quality of life in the EU.
- Sport can be a vehicle to enhance the overall physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of citizens and public health.
- Sport plays an important role in education, since young people learn about the values of tolerance and respect for the rules of fair play. Amateur and non-profit sport organised on a volunteer basis can enhance social inclusion as well as the active role of citizens.
- Sport can unite people, encourage international understanding, and symbolise the community that overcomes the burden of history.
- Participation in sport can promote social cohesion and can also be a tool for better and closer relations among Member States and between Member States and third countries.
- Racism and discrimination has in the past blighted sport as it has other areas of European society. But the principle of equality in sporting competitions can be an important contribution to promoting equality and fairness more broadly.

- Since ancient times, sport has formed an integral part of European identity, European culture and European civil society. In addition, today sport is also an instrument for promoting dialogue among cultures. Its power mainly stems from the zeal and enthusiasm of millions of active athletes, volunteers and fans that ensure the strong consolidation of sport in our society. The number of sports clubs and associations offers many people the opportunity not only to engage in physical exercise that benefits their overall well-being, but also to actively participate in society. In addition, amateur sport forms the basis from which many exceptional teams and individual athletes emerge.

1. Social and educational functions of sport

Health-enhancing physical activity is one of the top priorities which should be pursued at EU level. Based on the EU Physical Activity Guidelines, a Council recommendation would be a step in the right direction.

There is great potential to enhance public health through sport and physical activity. Regular physical activity is a positive means to effectively enhance a healthy lifestyle and the overall wellbeing of citizens. In our ageing societies, sport and physical activity are important means for maintaining the good health and well-being of the population and may help limiting health care costs.

EU actions in the field of health-enhancing physical activity should focus more on the promotion of physical activity across the entire life span (including older and disabled people), in facilitating multi-sectoral action (including urban planning and the transport sector) and in stimulating and supporting research and monitoring. Life-long learning within sport and physical well-being could be promoted by acknowledging new forms of sport and physical activities that attract young people.

Sport can foster the same positive values as those promoted by the European ideal. It embodies the concepts of responsibility, solidarity, tolerance, fair play, team spirit, persistence and realizing one's potential. Sport plays an important role in education, as it teaches young people values such as tolerance and respect for the rules of fair play. Physical education (PE) should be promoted as an important element of quality education.

A significant comparative advantage could be achieved if the sectors of education and sport cooperated better. While the Group is aware of the fact that physical education at school is a Member State competence, it wishes to underline the importance of increasing the practice of sport and physical activity in general and encouraging schools to change their way of thinking and create a better environment for extra-curricular physical activities. It is therefore desirable to promote cooperation between schools and sport organisations by every possible means and create the opportunity to have additional sport sessions. Important initiatives already exist in some Member States and there is a need for sharing of information and good practices.

There is potential for strengthening the role of education, training, qualifications and employment in sport and for taking advantage of the opportunities created by EQF and ECVET.

When accessible to all, sport can be a powerful tool for social inclusion, but when it is elitist and exclusive, it threatens to be socially divisive. The EU should encourage and support not only the social inclusion dimension regarding disability and gender equality through sport, but also the social inclusion of other excluded groups, such as migrants, children from low-income families and elderly people. Sport should be approached from a social context wherein all groups excluded on the basis of their various identities become an integral part of sport and physical activities. Specific provision should be made to encourage the participation of older as well as younger people.

Sporting events may help fight racism and discrimination in sport. More stringent measures should be adopted to fight racism and discrimination in sport, and to ensure workplaces free from manifestations of racism, homophobia, xenophobia and gender-based violence.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the definition of “migrants” include both migrants from outside the EU, where the focus should be on social inclusion, and migrants coming from other Member States, who may face problems in participating in amateur sport due to restrictions based on nationality.

Sport can promote greater understanding within and outside the European Union through sporting tours and international competitions. The benefits of this “horizon-broadening” activity have to be balanced against the cost, given the pressure on budgets. Where feasible, the promotion of interschool and interuniversity competitions is worthy of support.

Participation in sport and physical activities represents a significant challenge also outside EU societies. Problems may include low levels of volunteering, increasingly sedentary lifestyles, alternative forms of entertainment (e.g. computer games) and disaffection with the bureaucracy of organised sport. It is considered important that the Commission and the Member States, in the framework of EU development policies, seek to address these problems, whether by creating synergies with existing programmes of the UN, Member States, local authorities, NGOs and private bodies, or by encouraging greater decentralisation and local autonomy.

The exchange of good practices in the abovementioned areas is essential and should be supported among the Member States. Other parts of the world could provide inspiration, and benefit from our experience. For example, there could be a useful exchange of examples in the area of equal treatment in sport and also the development of sport in schools and universities.

2. Sport structures, particularly in relation to voluntary activities

Volunteering takes various forms throughout Europe, reflecting the diversity of approaches and traditions of EU Member States. Volunteering plays a crucial role in most EU Member States. A number of important characteristics of volunteering activities in sport should be taken into consideration.

Volunteers participate in a diverse and wide range of activities, such as educational services, leadership roles, mutual help, "self-help", campaigning, community and environmental actions.

Volunteering is a means for achieving social inclusion and integration and it can contribute to social cohesion by creating trust and solidarity bonds by investing in social capital.

Volunteering offers informal learning opportunities and is therefore a basic tool that contributes to the EU strategy for lifelong learning. Volunteering should be seen as an added value to one's curriculum vitae.

Bureaucracy is often the greatest problem that volunteers face, undermining motivation to take up or continue voluntary activities. Member States do not always consider the consequences for volunteering when adopting new laws. The EU should cooperate with Member States to avoid unnecessary regulation at European and national level, especially regarding issues of taxation and State aid control.

Volunteering in sport as well as gender equality could benefit from better educational provisions for volunteers, for example through training and including women for leading positions.

The promotion of volunteering should be a priority at EU level, with a focus on (de)regulatory measures and research. Good practices, such as employers allowing their employees time for voluntary activities, should be disseminated and promoted.

Volunteering is mainly a local or national phenomenon. As to the comparative advantage of the EU, any potential support for cross-border volunteering should be realistic.

The issue of sustainable financing in sport falls within national competence. The Group does not see a need to regulate gambling or betting activities at EU level but it was pointed out that a financial return to sport from sports betting activities appears justified and necessary to keep organised sport alive and vital.

3. Fairness and openness in sport

Issues under this heading refer mainly to professional sport. There is a general lack of transparency regarding financial flows, especially in connection with transfers. The Group does not argue in favour of regulation but strongly supports demands for more transparency within the sport movement.

Regarding sports agents, the EU should promote self-regulation by both sport organisations and associations of agents. There is no need to regulate the work of sports agents at EU level at this stage.

Regarding violence in sport, spectator violence is one aspect of it. This issue has already been covered by the Council of Europe and the EU. Violence by some fans in stadiums requires a coordinated approach and better cooperation between Member States.

When a federation is the authority responsible for organising championships with an economic dimension and simultaneously adopts regulations, a conflict of interests may arise and the EU's competition principles should be respected.

4. Physical and moral integrity of sportspersons

Research and better knowledge should be a priority for the Commission in order to better understand the phenomenon of doping and how to combat it, given that the World Anti-Doping Agency's research and competence are limited. Some experts called for a fundamental questioning of current anti-doping strategies since on the one hand a large international edifice for the fight against doping had been created, but on the other hand the problem did not seem to have become any smaller.

There is a need for EU action, not only relating to organised sport (professional and amateur) but also relating to non-organised sport (fitness clubs etc.). Preventing doping among very young athletes should be given priority. Some experts underlined that doping was a major health issue.

A better cooperation framework between the EU and WADA, especially to support athletes' fundamental rights, and stronger cooperation among national anti-doping organisations (NADOs) are some of the areas where the EU can provide added value.

With regard to the protection of minors, professional athletes should ideally not be minors. The fight against overtraining of young athletes is a major issue, which should be included in the nascent social dialogue at EU level.

The EU could also take action to improve national systems for health checks of very young athletes.

5. Dialogue and cooperation with sport stakeholders

Good governance in sport should be promoted through the future sport programme. EU projects should be used to examine the relationship between principles and practice and to identify cases of good and not so good practice. Moreover, Commission grants should only be awarded to sport organisations that fulfil good governance standards.

The European Capital of Sport initiative should henceforth be managed by the EU in a similar way as the European Capitals of Culture. The initiative should promote sport-minded cities that have a sustainable, citizen-friendly and effective way of promoting and offering sports and that can be communicated as role models. The selection and the award of this title should be managed by the Commission, possibly together with the European governing bodies of sport.

The specificity of sport has already been explained by the European Court of Justice and the Commission, as well as in the White Paper on Sport which provides clear guidance. However, little is known about certain specific aspects of sport governance and specificity, and research and proactive policy guidance will still be needed in the future.

The different needs and perspectives of amateur and professional sport should be taken into account in the structured dialogue between EU institutions and sport stakeholders. The structured dialogue should be sensitive to the diversity of sport and the competent EU bodies should not just listen to the strongest stakeholders. The Council of the European Union should find an appropriate place in the structured dialogue.

Structured dialogue with sport organisations must be inclusive and involve all relevant sport stakeholders when dealing with specific topics. The EU Sport Forum organised by the Commission should take place at regular intervals at least once a year.

Social dialogue in sport is underdeveloped and should be supported by the Commission as it can contribute to promote good governance in sport and to find solutions for existing issues within the framework of EU and national laws.

6. Sport programme

Concerning priority actions for a two-year limited sport programme covering the period 2012-2013, the Commission should focus on the following areas:

1. Health-enhancing physical activity: support for the assessment and dissemination of good practice and examples of physical activity promotion for health throughout the life span, and to help develop a multi-sectoral approach of physical activity promotion.
2. Social inclusion through sport, including disabled people, gender equality, migrants, discrimination and violence.
3. Education and training: support for exchange of best practices in the areas of sport and physical activity at school, dual careers and qualifications for the labour market in the area of sport (vocational education and training).
4. Research, particularly as regards health-enhancing physical activity, anti-doping, good governance and volunteering.
5. Promotion of the physical and moral integrity of sportspeople, including the fight against doping and preventive measures to protect the health of athletes, in particular the youngest ones.

In all areas, EU grants should be awarded on the basis of objective criteria following transparent and competitive calls for proposals.