

White Paper on sport

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own initiative report by Manolis **MAVROMMATIS** (EPP-ED, EL) on the White Paper on Sport, welcoming the publication of the Commission's White Paper and hoping that it serves as a basis for the sports world and the Commission to engage in a continuous dialogue in this area.

First of all, MEPs recall the importance of sport in society, bearing in mind that it generated an added value of EUR 407 billion in 2004 (3.7% of EU GDP) and employment for 15 million people (5.4% of the labour force). They also recall that 60% of EU citizens regularly participate in a sporting activity either in or outside of some 700 000 clubs. That is why they welcome the fact that sport has been recognised at Community level, particularly since the Lisbon Treaty, which, for the first time, dedicates an article – Article 49 – to incentive measures in this area. However, MEPs insist that all European policies on sport should take into consideration specific national features and therefore call on the Commission to promote, but not to regulate, the actions of Member States in this area, for example through clear guidelines on the application of EU legislation.

MEPs call on the Commission to ensure clarity, coherence and public visibility of EU rules applicable to sport. Overall, MEPs support the Commission's position in this area, which recommends, above all, self-regulation. They also believe that it is necessary to promote dialogue between sports organisations and the Commission.

Self-regulation: going by the Commission's position in this area, MEPs promote self-regulation provided that it is in compliance with Community law. Self-regulation should increase good governance and create a level playing field concerning financial transparency and stability of services in sport. MEPs hope to prevent all forms of 'financial doping' by ensuring the transparency of cash flows within sport. They call on sport federations to ensure that the licensing systems they choose do not lead to discrimination and that they comply with the principles of the internal market. In this context, MEPs welcome the Commission's proposal to hold a conference with UEFA, EPFL and Fifpro, as well as the national associations and national bodies responsible for organising professional football events in order to discuss licensing arrangements and best practices within this specific domain.

Doping: MEPs request Member States to agree on a common legislative approach towards doping and to define common positions in relation to WADA, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In particular, MEPs call on Member States to treat the trade in illegal doping substances in the same manner as the trade in illicit drugs and to actively combat doping by avoiding excessively busy schedules that put pressure on athletes. To combat doping, MEPs recommend checks, increased research and testing, long-term monitoring by independent doctors and measures focusing on prevention and training of athletes. It is also essential that professional clubs and sports organisations adopt a pledge to combat doping. It is in this context that MEPs call for a specific action plan on the fight against doping, in the run-up to the London 2012 Olympics.

Education, young people and health: stressing the role of sport in transmitting the fundamental values of tolerance, honesty and respect for the rules of fair play, MEPs insist on the concrete benefits of sport in terms of health and the fight against obesity. They welcome the Commission's proposal to promote sport and physical exercise in education and support the implementation of strategies, under the educational programmes, which seek to increase children's physical activity from a very early age. They call on Member States to approve the Commission's proposal regarding the award of a European prize to schools actively supporting physical exercise as part of the curriculum. However, to promote quality physical

education, there is a need for massive investment in this area, and not only in financial terms. That is why MEPs call on the Commission to recognise the legality of measures favouring the promotion of players who have come through training schemes, such as a minimum number of locally-trained players, irrespective of their nationality, on the professional staff. At the same time, MEPs call on Member States to combat the exploitation of girls and boys in sports and child trafficking. In particular, they deplore the practice of Member State governments selling school playing-fields for development. Furthermore, they consider it necessary to facilitate free access for people under 14 to all national and international competitions. In addition, MEPs call on the Commission to encourage the promotion of environmental and health protection during European sporting events.

Social inclusion and anti-discrimination: MEPs stress that sport is one of the most effective tools for social integration and, as such, should be promoted and supported by the European Union to a greater extent, for example through special programmes for organisers of European, national and local sporting and recreational events. Efforts should also be made to adapt sports' and schools' infrastructure to the needs of disabled people. At the same time, MEPs regret the fact that the gender aspect is not adequately taken into account in the White Paper (for example, on issues such as equal pay for equal value). Particular attention should be paid to access to sport for immigrant women and women from ethnic minorities. Furthermore, MEPs stress the particularly important role of sports for the social inclusion of those from less privileged backgrounds. Therefore, they call on Member States to incorporate sports activities and programmes in initiatives financed by the European Social Fund.

Policing of sports events: in order to prevent and address cases of violence and racism at sports events, MEPs call on Member States to encourage the exchange of best practices and of operational information on risk-supporters between police services. MEPs call on all parties concerned to play an active role by eliciting immediate and more stringent sanctions against racism and violence, be they on the field or in the stands, and to ensure high minimum standards are guaranteed by public authorities and competition organisers. At European level, MEPs call for increased cross-border police cooperation.

Economic aspects: MEPs call for the introduction of legislation to attach particular importance to respecting intellectual property rights relating to commercial communications, trademarks and images, names, media rights and any other spin-offs from sporting events. While they acknowledge the right of all media to access organised sporting events of public significance, they reiterate their support for Member States drawing up a list of events of major importance to the public that should be on free-to-air television. On another level, MEPs believe that an equitable redistribution of income between sport clubs, including the smallest ones, within and between the leagues, and between professional and amateur sport is essential. They also welcome the Commission's recognition of collective selling of media rights as a tool for achieving greater solidarity within sports. In terms of investment in sport, MEPs hope to ensure a continued source of alternative funding for non-professional sport, for example through national lotteries or other means. They voice their concern at a possible deregulation of the market in gambling and call on the Commission to evaluate the possible effects of deregulation of this sector on sport. MEPs also consider the issue of betting on sports and ask the Commission to come forward with a proposal preventing misuse and corruption. They also called for measures relating to tax. In addition, MEPs call for a percentage of the revenue generated by the sale of media rights to be allocated directly to funding the volunteer and non-profit sectors of sport.

Issues related to the employment of sports people: MEPs consider it undesirable for professional athletes to have fewer rights than other contracted workers. It is therefore necessary to ensure equal treatment through EU non-discrimination legislation. On the issue of the transfer of players, MEPs call on Member States to ensure, through their national legislation, that any rule in a European context respects EU law, particularly regarding the free movement of workers. MEPs insist that immigration law must always be respected in relation to the recruitment of young foreign talent in Europe. They call on the Commission to tackle the problem of child trafficking, to subscribe to a European charter for solidarity, to create a Solidarity Fund that would finance prevention programmes in countries most affected by human

trafficking and to review the FIFA Regulations for the Status and Transfer of Players in relation to the protection of minors. MEPs also consider that the regulatory provisions concerning players' agents should be strengthened and they call on the Commission to support this initiative, including through a Directive, if necessary.

EU sport funding: lastly, MEPs request for the 2009 budget a special budget line for preparatory actions in the field of sport, bearing in mind that a specific EU funding programme on sport would not be operational before 2011 (assuming the Lisbon Treaty is ratified). At the same time, MEPs call on the Commission to launch preparatory actions in the field of social inclusion and sport and to take into consideration the possibility of creating supporting programmes for students with special physical qualities. Furthermore, they urge the Commission to mainstream sport properly in existing EU policies and EU funding programmes.