European dimension in sport

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The European Parliament adopted by 550 votes to 73, with 7 abstentions, a resolution on the European dimension in sport.

Parliament recalls that billions of people throughout the world play sports invented, codified and disseminated in Europe and sport plays an important part in the European economy, as it directly or indirectly employs 15 million people, and represents an annual added value of approximately EUR 407 billion, or 3.65% of Europe's GDP. It also recalls that 35 million amateurs assist the development of mass-participation sport and the dissemination of sporting ideals.

The social role of sport: Parliament urges the Commission to propose a dedicated and ambitious budget for sports policy under the future MFF given the public health, social, cultural and economic benefits of sport.

The Commission is also asked to:

- make use of its coordinating function in sport to gather examples of best practice from the Member States and make these available to all interested parties throughout Europe in a central database;
- encourage the practice of sport among senior citizens as it helps to promote social interaction and high rates of good health.

For their part, Member States are asked to:

- ensure that sport becomes a subject in the curriculum of schools of all kinds, and underlines the importance of encouraging participation in sports at all levels of education, from early years onwards;
- promote and support the cooperation of schools and sports clubs;
- increase their grants to organisations that seek to integrate through sport people at risk of social exclusion or that promote sport for physically or mentally disabled people;
- **prevent and fight against any form of discrimination or racism**.

Members underline the importance of making sport available to **all citizens** in many different settings, whether at school, at work, as a recreational activity or through clubs and associations.

They stress the great socially-integrating power of sport in many areas, including civic commitment and the conception of democracy, the promotion of good health, urban development, and education. They also stress the role of sport as a means of promoting peace, economic growth, intercultural dialogue, public health, integration and the emancipation of women. The resolution underlines that sports at all ages is an important area of great potential for increasing the overall health level of Europeans and therefore calls on the EU and on Member States to facilitate engagement in sport and to promote a healthy lifestyle fully exploiting the opportunities of sport, thereby **reducing spending on healthcare**.

The Member States and the Community institutions are encouraged to increase their grants to organisations that seek to integrate through sport people at risk of social exclusion or that promote sport for physically or mentally **disabled people**. In this regard, Parliament calls on the Commission, the Member States and sports organisations to promote and develop, with appropriate funding, sport activities and competitions for people with disabilities, notably by making available and giving to them equal access to sport and **free-of-charge sports facilities tailored to their needs**.

Parliament calls on sport organisations to further encourage **women's participation** in sport and in the governance bodies of sports organisations by guaranteeing equal access to sporting activities, in particular for girls and women from disadvantaged backgrounds. It underlines that parents' prohibiting immigrant girls from taking part in sports and swimming at school cannot be tolerated or excused on cultural or religious grounds.

The resolution calls on the Council, the Commission, the Member States and national governing sports bodies to commit to tackling homophobia and transphobia and to implement legislation and anti-discrimination policies especially for lesbian, bi-sexual, gay and transgender athletes properly.

Parliament stress the need to fight against **doping**, and urge Member States to treat trafficking in illegal performance-enhancing substances in the sports world in the same way as trafficking in illegal drugs. It calls on the World Anti-Doping Agency to create an easy-to-use whereabouts administration system in line with EU law and believe the accession of the EU to the Anti-Doping Convention of the Council of Europe is a necessary step.

With regard to the issue of **training**, Members stress the critical importance of dual sport and career training for young sportspersons. They call on the Commission and the Member States, together with all the relevant actors, to draw up guidelines to ensure young sportspersons are able to pursue normal school and/or professional studies in addition to their sports training. They propose that a training and qualifications framework for coaches and coach education be established and incorporated in the European Qualifications Framework and Lifelong Learning Programmes in order to advance a knowledge-based society and the development of excellence in coaching at both the amateur and professional level. In general, they highlight the role of coaches in the development and education of young people.

Parliament moves on to call on Member States, in close consultation with the relevant federations to refuse access to stadiums to **supporters who have displayed violent or discriminatory behaviour** and to create a coordinated approach in setting and enforcing sanctions against them. It takes a positive view of the Member States' drawing up minimum safety standards for stadiums, in consultation with the European sports federations, and taking all appropriate measures to ensure that players and supporters are as safe as possible.

The economic dimension of sport: Parliament calls on the Commission and the Member States to accord a high status to voluntary activities in sport. It favours an exchange of information and best practice between Member States in order to promote volunteering in sport and of exploring the feasibility of a legal and tax framework. Members call on the Commission and the Member States to create a system for the recognition of qualifications gained by volunteers and of qualifications required for regulated sport-related professions, and stress that the mutual recognition of courses and specialist training within a unified European framework for professionals working in sport as specialists (referees, coaches) is particularly important. They make various recommendations on improving structures for sports people.

Members believe that, in the constantly evolving economic dimension of the sport industry, immediate improvements to sport-related issues are needed in crucial areas such as the free movement of workers and services, freedom of establishment, recognition of professional qualifications, intellectual property rights and state aid rules in order to guarantee that the sports industry takes full advantage of the benefits of the internal market.

The resolution goes on to call on the Member States to consider ways of alleviating the financial burden on the lowest-paid professional sportspersons, who have brief and fluctuating careers. On matters of financing, it discuss the fundamental importance of commercial exploitation of **audiovisual rights for sport competitions** being carried out on a centralised, exclusive and territorial basis with a view to

guaranteeing that revenues are distributed fairly between elite and mass-participation sport. Member States should ensure that broadcasters under its jurisdiction do not broadcast such events on an exclusive basis.

With regard to **bets**, the resolution considers that betting on sport is a form of **commercial exploitation of competitions** and calls on the Commission and the Member States to protect betting from unauthorised activities, from unlicensed operators and from suspicions of match fixing. Members reiterate their request that the Commission draw up guidelines on **state aid**, indicating what type of public support is legitimate with a view to achieving the social, cultural and educational goals of sport.

They discuss the following matters:

- effective action to fight corruption and promote ethics in sport, with strict rules on the financial supervision of sports clubs;
- concrete measures to secure the funding of sport generated by lotteries;
- grass-roots sport should benefit from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund, which should allow for investment in sports infrastructure.

Organisation of sport: noting that sports structures in Europe are based on the principles of nationality and territoriality, Parliament reaffirms its attachment to the European model of sport, within which federations play a central role and which has various actors, including supporters, players, clubs, leagues, associations and volunteers at its base, which have a fundamental role in supporting the entire sport structure. It calls for a reduction in the barriers to volunteering in sport across the EU.

It calls for good governance in sport, with **zero tolerance for corruption in sport**.

On the matter of **organisation,** Members stress the following:

- sporting clubs should make players available when they are selected for national teams;
- ensure that high-level sport does not affect the development of young sportsmen, amateur sports and the essential role of grassroots sporting organisations;
- commitment to the home-grown player rule;
- the importance of training allowances, as these provide an effective protection mechanism for training centres and a fair return on investment;
- the profession of sports agents should be a regulated professional activity, and subject to an adequate official qualification and that sports agents' fiscal residence should be within EU territory in the interest of transparency;
- draw up and implement, in cooperation with the sports federations, players' unions and agents' associations, a European licensing and registration system accompanied by a code of conduct and a sanctioning mechanism;
- supplement existing regulatory provisions governing players' agents / intermediaries with deterrent sanctions and to implement these sanctions rigorously;
- make international transfers more transparent.

Members propose the setting up by sports federations of a **non-public European register of sports agents** , in which agents would list the names of the players that they represent, so as to protect athletes, in particular those below the age of 18 so as to limit the risk of conflicts of interest. The payment of agents' fees for transfers should be made in a number of **instalments** throughout the duration of the contract.

On the issue of **finance,** Members stress the need to improve governance, restore long-term financial stability and sustainability of clubs and contribute to financial fairness in European competitions. They

welcome the efforts of sports federations to ban the ownership of more than one sports club engaged in the same competition. They take the view that betting operators should be prohibited from holding a controlling stake in a body which organises or participates in competitions.

They urge Member States to take all necessary action to prevent and punish illegal activities affecting the integrity of sport and making such activities a criminal offence; in particular where such they are betting-related.

Cooperation with non-member States and international organisations: the resolution calls on the Commission and the Member States to cooperate with non-member states on issues such as international player transfers, exploitation of underage players, match fixing piracy and illegal betting. It looks forward to the results of systems put in place for monitoring transparency and financial fair play and for combating corruption and human trafficking. Members call on the Commission and the Member States to promote in all cooperation with non-member states the global respect of Olympic rules and regulations. They also stress the need to: (i) ensure compliance with immigration laws; (ii) boost the protection of minors in the context of international transfers; (iii) the absolute freedom to exercise any kind of sport for both women and men.

European identity through sport: Members propose a series of measures to strengthen the European dimension. They call for a 'European Day of Sports' every year, the designation of a 'European capital of sport' every year, and raising awareness of these games through the promotion of a European map and European festivals. They suggest that the European flag should be flown at major international sports events held on the EU territory and suggests to sports federations to consider the idea of having it displayed on the clothing of athletes from Member States, alongside the national flags.

Lastly, Members calls on the Commission to provide the Union with a **specific budget programme in the field of sport**, and submit, by 2012, a proposal aimed at gaining a better understanding of the specific needs of the sports sector and taking practical action to address them, with full regard to the provisions of Article 165 TFEU.