The free movement of football supporters and measures against holiganism

1995/2108(INI) - 24/04/1996

The draft report by Mrs Claudia ROTH was adopted by 15 votes to zero, but with 9 abstentions by the members of the PPE and the UPE following a vote on approximately one hundred amendments. The report noted that acts of hooliganism and violence before, during and after football matches, especially international matches, were a problem which was becoming more widespread and which had a cross-border dimension which should be dealt with at Union level. Current international preventive measures were taken on the basis of simple cooperation agreements between the Member States and were of a fragmentary nature. In addition, they had already given rise to complaints on the part of EU citizens who objected to the limitation on the free movement of persons and the absence of means of recourse. Mrs ROTH was conscious of the social and cultural aspects underlying the phenomenon of hooliganism and of the fact that there were groups of right-wing extremists which took advantage of football to spread violence, racism and xenophobia. But she also realized that not all football supporters were hooligans and that this undesirable phenomenon could not be fought at the expense of the fundamental rights of citizens (who enjoyed football) and the free movement of persons within the European Union. An additional difficulty was that the Commission should not present initiatives on this subject because she considered that the EU did not have powers in this area. However, the rapporteur considered that the EU and the Member States could help to implement an anti-hooliganism policy to contain the phenomenon and keep it within manageable proportions, while respecting the fundamental rights of citizens and their freedom of movement at European level. The report also considered that: - all-sitting stadia were unnecessary and that the installation of "cages" was dangerous, degrading and could incite violence; - the participation of women and children at sporting events should be encouraged by providing stands for families; - the highly successful "fan projects" as an excellent means of preventing violence and called for the development of such initiatives; in particular it: - called on clubs, national associations, the UEFA and the FIFA to fund supporters projects and for supporters projects to be funded by Community appropriations as part of EURO 96 and the 1998 World Cup; - proposed that initiatives be developed (exchanges, meetings etc.) in order to promote good understanding between supporters of opposing teams and for the supporters themselves to design strategies to eradicate violence; - strongly recommended that the Commission take measures against football clubs which only sold tickets as part of a travel package; - reiterated that players' behaviour during matches could be a deciding factor and called on them to abstain from any violent or aggressive behaviour and to openly voice their rejection of violence, racism and xenophobia, if necessary by refusing to play during any racist, violent or xenophobic demonstration; - reiterated its proposal to award three prizes each year to a team, a sports personality and a supporters club in recognition of their sense of fair play; - called on the media to help promote respect and fair play in sport, fight against aggressive and chauvinistic behaviour and avoid any "sensationalism" when reporting violence during sports events. As far policing and the courts are concerned, the report: - called on the Member States to make provision for and apply suitable punishment to persons found guilty of offences, such as banning them from stadia for a given period; - considered that policing should be carried out by local police officers, accompanied during international matches by police officers from the place of origin of the away team, and that international police cooperation to fight against violence in stadia should be strengthened. Finally, the report called for the European institutions to take a number of measures: - the Commission should draft an exhaustive, comparative report on hooliganism as a multidimensional social phenomenon in the Member States and investigate the role of extremist organizations in violence in sport; - the Council should draw up a convention on the fight against violence at football matches under the third pillar; - the IGC should give the EU powers in the sports sector which would enable it to implement a pro-active, consistent and coherent Community sports policy.