

Future of professional football in Europe

2006/2130(INI) - 29/01/2007

The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Ivo BELET (EPP-ED, BE) on the future of professional football in Europe. The report looked at a number of areas such as governance in the football sector, the social, cultural and educational role of football, employment and social issues, the fight against racism and competition law.

The committee stressed "its attachment to the European Football Model, with its symbiotic relationship between amateur and professional football". The Commission was urged to establish an action plan for European sport in general and football in particular. The committee noted that, although the EU has no specific legislative powers in this area, the EC Treaty contains a wide array of instruments which could be employed under the action plan.

MEPs wanted to see improved governance in the football sector, and called on all football governing bodies to "better define and coordinate their competences, responsibilities, functions and decision-making procedures in order to increase their democracy, transparency and legitimacy, for the benefit of the entire football sector". The committee also backed the UEFA club licensing system aimed at ensuring a level playing-field between clubs and contributing to their financial stability, and urged UEFA to further develop this system in order to guarantee financial transparency and proper management.

Among its other recommendations, the report called for the creation of an independent supervisory body to monitor the financial and commercial activities of European clubs and to enforce their compliance with the criteria on financial transparency and proper management. It also called on the Council to develop measures for the fight against "the criminal activities that haunt professional football", including money laundering, illegal betting, doping, match fixing and enforced prostitution on the sidelines of major football events. The Member States were urged to promote cooperation between clubs, the police and supporters' organisations with a view to combating violence and hooliganism. And the Commission, the Member States and all those involved in professional football were asked "to accept.... their responsibility for continuing and intensifying the fight against racism and xenophobia by condemning all forms of racism inside and outside the stadium".

MEPs also backed the UEFA "home-grown players" initiative aimed at promoting young local talent, while nevertheless stressing that additional arrangements are necessary to ensure that this initiative does not lead to child trafficking, with some clubs giving contracts to very young children (below 16 years of age). They also insisted that immigration law must always be respected when recruiting young foreign talent and that young players must be given the opportunity for a general education and vocational training in parallel with their club and training activity, so that they do not entirely depend on the clubs. The Commission was also asked to support the fight against child labour in football-related industries.

The committee wanted the Commission to draw up clear guidelines on State aid rules, indicating what kind of public support is acceptable and legitimate in order to fulfil the social, cultural and educational role played by football, and to reflect on the consequences of a possible liberalisation of the betting market and on mechanisms to secure the financing of football. Lastly, it called for a policy aimed at preventing and combating doping, including a pledge by professional clubs to monitor compliance through internal checks, and urged the Commission to set up an independent doping control body.