



European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/514
Sport and European Values

Brussels, 2 July 2015

OPINION

of the
European Economic and Social Committee
on
Sport and European Values
(own-initiative opinion)

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On 10 July 2014, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on:

Sport and European Values.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 17 June 2015.

At its 509th plenary session, held on 1 and 2 July (meeting of 2 July), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 99 votes to 59 with 32 abstentions.

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 Sport helps meet the EU's strategic objectives, brings to the fore key educational and cultural values and is a conduit of integration, since it is open to all members of the public, regardless of their gender, ethnic origin, religion, age, nationality, social situation or sexual orientation. Sport is a tool to tackle intolerance, xenophobia and racism.
- 1.2 Sporting activities allow all people to channel their hopes in a constructive way, enriching them with the values that sport entails such as hard work, solidarity and cohesion. Such activities also bring physical and mental well-being while helping to alleviate social problems by providing positive values. In this regard, the debate should also focus on establishing a body of minimum universal standards which promote the integrity of the practice of sport by children and young people in all sporting disciplines.
- 1.3 Volunteering has a key role to play in the development of grassroots sport and in clubs, affording it considerable value from a social, economic and democratic point of view. Volunteering and active citizenship through sport, including winter sports, should therefore be promoted.
- 1.4 The principle of good governance and sound management should ensure integrity in sporting competitions. In sport, autonomy is a condition for sporting organisations which must act in accordance with the principles of transparency, accountability and democracy. In light of this, all stakeholders must be appropriately represented in the decision-making process. In order to consolidate this general prevention framework, and as demonstrated by a recent

comprehensive study¹, trust must be built up between national authorities and sporting institutions with a view to facilitating the necessary exchange of information between national judicial authorities and international sports institutions.

- 1.5 As regards innovation, the EESC urges the Commission and Member States to disseminate information and to exchange among themselves, in a European context, information on positive experiences and best practices relating to ways to create and support strategic partnerships between the main stakeholders from different sectors, aimed at strengthening the role of sport as a driver of innovation and economic growth. In this respect, it is very important to know how to reap the benefits that organising major sporting events can and should bring to the regions and cities in which they are held. The Committee believes that the Commission must pay attention to the new initiatives and methodologies emerging at international level which are aimed at helping regions and cities put into practice sports projects that promote sustainable economic and social development.
- 1.6 With an eye to the development of the sports sector, steps should be taken to foster at different levels the use of EU funding instruments.
- 1.7 At European level, efforts should be made to promote social cohesion, measures to include disadvantaged groups in sporting activities and social integration, including that of prisoners, so that they may find in sport a tool for reintegration into society, since it brings emotional well-being and provides a source of stability through the values of hard work, solidarity and ultimately "fair play". These can help eradicate social exclusion and discrimination.
- 1.8 The EU has an important role to play in tackling inequality with a view to removing the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from taking part in sport, promoting their participation in competitions and eradicating any form of social prejudice in this regard. A positive step would therefore be for the Commission to propose to the Council of Ministers that it draw up a "European Code of Good Practices on Sport and Social Inclusion" with a view to fostering and promoting more extensively the practice of sport among people with disabilities.
- 1.9 Special attention should be devoted by the EU and Member States to promoting sport and physical exercise amongst older people. In an increasingly ageing Europe, it is of paramount importance that targeted initiatives and funding are deployed to this effect.

2. **Introduction**

- 2.1 Within the framework of the integration process, the Lisbon Treaty provides for certain values which are common to the EU and its Member States. These higher values are human

¹ Protecting the Integrity of Sport Competition: The Last Bet for Modern Sport, p. 120-124, University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS), May 2014.

dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

The Lisbon Treaty gives the EU authority to promote the European aspects of sport (Art. 165 TFEU). The various dimensions of sport (social, economic and cultural) must be examined from the point of view of how they tie in with the values enshrined in Article 2 TEU, entailing a clear commitment to act on the part of the institutions and the Member States, which must promote policies, standards and measures to develop the European aspects of sport, while at the same time applying the subsidiarity principle.

- 2.2 The aim of this own-initiative opinion is to promote the potential of European values and the values of sport, including winter sports, to all citizens and social organisations, and to promote the EU sport policy, given that until now judicial decisions on the subject have been only sporadic, usually related to the exercise of economic freedoms.
- 2.3 Even in ancient times, classical Greek philosophy distinguished between the activities of the body and the mind and the Olympic spirit was the fruition of these ideas, with ethics and the promotion of peace playing a key role.

Sport has an important part to play in meeting the European and worldwide goals of the Europe 2020 strategy, given the significant contribution this sector can make to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

3. **The social function of sport**

- 3.1 In order to safeguard the social function of sport, Member States must have in place suitable infrastructure to facilitate the practice of sport, with the respective regions of each country having an appropriate, sufficient and balanced basic network of sporting facilities and equipment.
- 3.2 Volunteering continues to be the cornerstone of sport in Europe, since it is volunteers who enable sporting ideals to develop and spread, together with charitable sports associations. In this regard, a strong emphasis should be placed on the role of schools in championing Olympic values, as they foster peace and harmony in sport, preserving a system of coexistence and integration in a democratic and pluralist society as well as the human values which are identified with sport and play a role in eradicating violence, racism, intolerance and xenophobia in this area.
 - 3.2.1 The application of the principles of good governance is essential for sports organisations. These must be guided by the principles of transparency, responsibility and democracy and must duly represent all stakeholders in the decision-making process, including the fans who generally promote the principles of fair play. Consideration should be given to the possibility of imposing stricter transparency requirements when activities are funded with public money.

- 3.2.2 The EESC believes that consideration should be given to taking coordinated action against undesirable phenomena such as match fixing, doping and violence not only on the basis of the EU's competences set out in Articles 6 and 165 TFEU, but also those relating to the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice and any others which might be necessary in order to adopt supranational measures that could even act as a genuine deterrent.
- 3.2.3 These measures should aim to ensure a high level of safety and could, for example, include measures geared towards ensuring cooperation and coordination between police (Europol) and judicial (Eurojust) authorities and other competent authorities, which must include sporting federations.
- 3.3 Promoting physical activity and the practice of sport is a key factor in protecting public health in a modern society. It should be pointed out that sport promotes a healthy lifestyle and improves quality of life, so that people take full advantage of the opportunities it affords, thereby reducing spending on healthcare.
- 3.4 The institutional measures taken by the EU in the area of sport have received a significant boost thanks to the public debate surrounding the "European dimension of sport", the inclusion of sport in the Erasmus + programme and the strategic actions on gender equality in sport, among other things. The priorities of this programme are discussed every year and, for this reason, the EESC calls for the next evaluation to take account of the observations of this opinion.
- 3.4.1 This institutional action will have to be strengthened by taking the steps needed to make use of the added value and positive aspects of indigenous, traditional and more locally-based sports as proof of the EU's cultural and historical diversity. This diversity should be fostered and promoted.
- 3.4.2 On the basis of the abovementioned Erasmus + programme, the Commission should provide a clear assessment of the impact of including sports in that programme, especially as regards meeting the objectives on new skills and jobs and young people.
- 3.5 In order to ensure that sport contributes to the consolidation and development of European values, it is essential to adopt and execute measures of a coordinating, complementary or supporting nature which are designed to protect these European values, especially those geared to protecting human dignity, as well as some aspects of the education of people whose proper integration is essential if democracy and the rule of law are to function smoothly. This approach could be enhanced through the "fair play" message channelled by sport, which conveys to society a large number of European values.

The European dimension of sport is no less important in helping to meet some of the benchmarks for equality between men and women. An important step would be to create and

use educational materials to train sports leaders and parents in order to contribute to the elimination of gender stereotypes and the promotion of gender equality in sport, and to encourage an ever greater balance in the representation of both sexes on management boards and sports committees. In this connection, the development of a best practices charter for the development of young people and protection in sport is viewed as a major step².

3.6 Playing sport, individually and collectively, can be a legitimate source of job creation, wealth and well-being. Making proper use of sport has a very important role to play nowadays if we are to tackle youth unemployment and social exclusion. Special mention should be made of the situation of athletes who begin a second career after having retired from high-level competitive sport and who need to prepare in a specific way for this stage in their lives (dual career). Equivalence and recognition of diplomas and qualifications in sport are needed for the proper development of these young people. The latter point is important in order to put an end to the shadow economy which may exist in this sector and to move towards legalisation in future.

3.6.1 It would be a good idea to decide how European funding mechanisms can be used to encourage people to play sport as a way of promoting social integration and youth employment, gender equality, innovation, creation of networks of organisations which champion social reintegration and meeting other goals of public interest.

As a way of tackling social exclusion and a means of reintegration, sport is an appropriate means of moving closer to values which boost personal and social development, with an impact on people's health and education. At European level, efforts should be made to promote social cohesion and social integration, including that of prisoners, who may find in sport a tool for reintegration into society, since it brings emotional well-being and provides a source of cohesion and stability through the values of hard work, solidarity and ultimately "fair play".

3.6.2 A network of organisations should be created to advocate social cohesion and social reintegration through sport, especially those which are played most widely, in such a way that there is an exchange of best practices based on the European values enshrined in the Treaties, with a European congress of innovative practices for social reintegration through sport, championships organised at European Union level and the publication and dissemination of these networks' results.

3.7 One of the EU's institutional tasks associated with tackling inequality is to remove the barriers preventing people with disabilities from taking part in sport, promoting their participation in competitions and eradicating any form of social prejudice in this regard.

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This was one of the main conclusions of the Inter Regional Sports Policy Summit (Lisbon, 16-17 March 2015), which brought together most of the key international stakeholders to establish sports policies.

A positive step would be for the Commission to propose to the Council of Ministers that it draw up a "European Code of Good Practices on Sport and Social Inclusion".

- 3.7.1 The integration of people with disabilities should be promoted through sporting events with a view to improving quality of life and developing the social habits of people with disabilities and their families. For this reason, sport is not just a healthy habit, it also improves and enhances the mobility of these people and allows them to develop their decision-making abilities, friendships and team-working skills.
- 3.7.2 In order to promote Paralympic or high-level sport for people with disabilities and thus raise the level of public awareness, the public authorities must roll out a communication strategy with an eye to the Paralympic Games and other high-level international events, making use of key media and professionals and resulting in high-quality television coverage of the Paralympic Games, a significant amount of airtime and the use of primetime television slots.
- 3.7.3 The provisions adapting each national legislative framework to the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities pursue the same goals and provide for "accessibility and design for all" as tools which must be used to change and create environments which allow full public participation.
- 3.7.4 Since the lack of training of the various stakeholders is one of the barriers systematically identified when seeking to develop programmes to promote inclusion of older people and people with disabilities in sporting activities, it is recommended that the necessary material be provided to meet the training needs of primary and secondary school physical education teachers and sports coaches to develop sporting activities in an inclusive environment.
- 3.8 The apparently irreversible process of the ageing of European society, accompanied by a constant increase of life expectancy, makes it indispensable to develop targeted initiatives and programmes to promote sport and physical exercise amongst older people. This is an area which, in most countries, has been overlooked and requires special attention, both at EU and Member State level.

4. **The economic nature of sport**

- 4.1 Sport has an economic dimension based on professional sport and sport as a business, which affect the internal market. Another specific dimension of sport is voluntary work and its social, educational and cultural functions, which make a significant contribution to positive values such as sportsmanship, respect and social inclusion.

Therefore, a distinction must be made between sporting and commercial interests, and the EESC believes that sport should be protected from excessive economic influence so that the principles and values of sport prevail.

- 4.1.1 The unique and essential characteristics of sport should be given specific consideration when applying EU legislation in cases where the EU may play a more effective role than the Member States and with due consideration for the subsidiarity principle.
- 4.2 With regard to the economic dimension of sport, account must be taken of the special ties between these activities and fundamental rights.
- 4.2.1 Therefore, in order ensure appropriate protection against infringements of intellectual property rights and, in particular, against digital piracy, which put the business of sport at risk, consideration should be given to adopting measures based on the principle of proportionality. In any case, the fundamental rights of citizens to receive information must prevail. The aim here is to ensure, at the very least, that the public has the right to obtain and receive news, major sporting events are broadcast and that journalists have the right to inform.
- 4.2.2 It would be a good idea to adopt directives in other areas such as competition policy - specifically State aid - in order to clarify what kinds of aid are considered to be a legitimate means of meeting sport's social, cultural and educational objectives.
- 4.2.3 Online sports betting in unregulated markets, especially illegal betting, currently represents one of the main threats to sport; its negative effects are comparable to those of doping and spectator violence and may lead to manipulation of the uncertain nature of sporting competitions. With regard to other aspects, such as betting and gambling, there is a need to adopt public interest measures to prevent gambling addiction and protect minors, especially against online gambling.
- 4.2.4 Sport has an in-built and inherent incentive to push those who practise sport towards constant improvement in performance and excellence, meaning that the sports sector is characterised by constant innovation that has made sports technology a major sector within the "applied sciences", including textile technology, human motion mechanics, new materials, sensors, actuators and human-oriented design in particular. The building and running of sports facilities and participation and attendance at sports events are becoming an important part of the experience economy, of which the development of sport tourism is also an example.
- 4.2.5 Other themes related economically to sport, such as the free movement of people and services, sponsorship deals, regulating the activities of players' agents, sports insurance and health, educational programmes for sportsmen and women and professional qualifications relating to sport, should be examined and, where appropriate, measures relating to these areas should be proposed or adopted by the Commission.
- 4.2.6 With regard to professional training for younger trainers, the rules in the different EU Member States must be improved, given that the work of a trainer is comparable to that of a teacher and that, in some cases (e.g. preparation for sporting competitions), the trainer spends more time with the young sportsperson than a teacher does with their pupils. Training for

trainers must take place in a formal framework and be certified by a teaching diploma issued by the State.

- 4.2.7 The EESC calls for European sporting federations to play a role in defending the values and principles set out in this opinion, in the hope that their work in all areas is underpinned by these values and principles, at the very least the activities associated with the award of public prizes and recognition.

Brussels, 2 July 2015

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Henri Malosse
