

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘Developing the European dimension of sport’**

(2012/C 9/14)

## THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- stresses that local and regional authorities have always acknowledged and harnessed the educational potential of sport, incorporating it into education policies and measures to improve quality of life, including in terms of public health;
- welcomes, in particular, the steps taken by the European Commission to support the fight against fraud and corruption in the field of sport;
- emphasises the ethical values of sport and in particular the need to teach young people the value of losing and fair play, starting with trainers and technicians, who must teach by example, in order to put a stop to improper and counter-educational incidents;
- stresses the societal value of sports initiatives such as the Special Olympics and the Paralympics, which further the social inclusion of people with disabilities, contributing in varying degrees to their personal independence;
- advocates supporting innovative initiatives, in the framework of lifelong learning, to encourage physical exercise in schools, especially between the ages of four and fourteen;
- calls for the opportunities under the European Regional Development Fund to be fully exploited in support of sports infrastructure and activities and for opportunities under the European Social Fund to be used to improve the skills and employability of workers in the sports sectors.

<b>Rapporteur</b>	Roberto PELLA (IT/EPP), Member of the Council of Valdengo, Member of the Council of the City of Biella
<b>Reference document</b>	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Developing the European Dimension in Sport  COM(2011) 12 final

## I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

#### General context

1. expresses its general appreciation of the Commission's Communication on Developing the European Dimension in Sport <sup>(1)</sup>, which follows on from the White Paper on Sport <sup>(2)</sup> and which cites Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) as the legal basis for EU action. The Communication addresses 15 priorities, grouped together in four main sections, namely the societal role of sport; the economic dimension of sport; the organisation of sport; and cooperation with third countries and international organisations with regard to sport;

2. welcomes the European Commission's confirmation of the principles set out in the White Paper on Sport to the effect that in order to implement a winning strategy, measures in the sport sector must be coordinated with those in related sectors: health, education, training, youth, regional development and cohesion, social inclusion, employment, citizenship, justice, internal affairs, research, the internal market and competition;

3. stresses that Article 165 TFEU also refers to measures to promote sport, on which basis the European Commission could have considered putting forward new arrangements for expenditure under the ongoing Financial Perspectives, such as a two-year EU sports programme;

4. reiterates the European Commission's point that Article 165 TFEU recognises the specific nature of sport, acknowledged also in the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union and calls for the elaboration and application of EU rules to take account of the specific nature of sport;

5. underlines with satisfaction that Article 6 and 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) confer a supporting, coordinating and complementary role upon the EU in the area of sport which gives fresh impetus to developing the European dimension of sport. Whilst respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the autonomy of sport's governing structures, the European actions lend European

added value to the sports initiatives of Member States and local and regional authorities, as a catalyst for increasing the impact of action in the area of sports;

6. stresses that sport and the national, European and international organisations that manage and regulate it (the International Olympic Committee, national Olympic committees, and sports associations and organisations for the disabled and grassroots sport) can make an effective contribution to achieving the EU's long-term strategic goals, in particular the Europe 2020 targets, and to opening up new job prospects, especially for young people;

7. underlines the role of sport in forging a European identity, as well as in fighting racism and xenophobia;

8. welcomes the recognition of the complexity and the importance that the Commission and the Council of the European Union (the Council) give to the proposals for joint action in the field of sport, and to informal cooperation between the Member States, in order to ensure the continued exchange of good practice and dissemination of information on the results achieved;

9. welcomes the European Commission's and the Council's <sup>(3)</sup> intention to provide support for informal sport-related expert groups that the Member States wish to create and which will report to Council Working Party on Sport; calls for such groups to include the CoR;

10. values the fact that the European Commission's DG MARKT has commissioned an independent study on the funding of grassroots sport in Europe to assess the different financing systems (such as state, regional and local funding, household contributions, contributions from voluntary activities, sponsorship, media revenue and revenue from the organisation of online and other gambling services) and analyse a wide range of internal market policies with a direct impact on these financing systems; calls for the Commission to directly involve the Committee of the Regions and local and regional authorities in the current and future study projects in their capacity as the promoting authorities or the authorities closest to the interested parties;

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2011) 12.  
<sup>(2)</sup> COM(2007) 391.

<sup>(3)</sup> Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a European Union Work Plan for Sport for 2011-2014.

### The role of local and regional authorities

11. believes that local and regional authorities play a fundamental role in developing the European dimension of sport since, within the limits of their institutional remit, they help ensure the provision of sport services to the public which, from an administrative perspective, are important instruments for furthering social inclusion and fighting discrimination;

12. also emphasises that local and regional authorities, play a fundamental role in providing funding for sports activities and the facilities they require. Also, local and regional authorities, in cooperation with the sport organisations and – where existing – the regional branches of national Olympic committees, play a fundamental role in motivating people to take up sport; also advocates that countries in which such structures do not yet exist set up regional sports structures which would play an important role at regional level in encouraging people to take up sport and promoting it;

13. recalls the local and regional authorities' vital role in coordinating all the various stakeholders involved in sport in their areas, in particular by providing support for associations and voluntary activity in the sector;

14. stresses that local and regional authorities have always acknowledged and harnessed the educational potential of sport, incorporating it into education policies and measures to improve quality of life, including in terms of public health;

15. considers it vital for the European Commission to respect the autonomy of sports governing structures as a fundamental principle relating to the organisation of sport, and to respect the competences of the Member States, in line with the principle of subsidiarity;

16. considers it essential to address challenges such as violence and intolerance associated with sports events and to take vigorous legislative action to tackle transnational challenges affecting European sport, such as fraud, match-fixing and doping;

17. urges the European Commission to give the Committee of the Regions, local and regional authorities, national sport organisations and – where existing – the regional branches of national Olympic committees, a more incisive role in the planning and implementation phases of sports policies;

18. stresses the capacity of sport to build relations between public institutions, associations, federations, clubs and other organisations, and believes networks are needed which facilitate and speed up exchange of expertise in the area of sport and its societal impact. To this end, establishing networks of public authorities working at local level would be a major step forwards in developing the role of municipalities in taking forward the societal impact of sport and would enable them to contribute to the enhancement of sport at European level;

19. calls on the European Commission, in furtherance of incentive and support measures for sports projects or existing programmes in areas such as education, lifelong learning, public health, youth, citizenship, research, social inclusion, gender equality and the fight against racism, to actively involve the CoR in discussions accompanying the preparation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework;

20. considers it essential for the European Commission to involve the Committee of the Regions from the very outset in all ongoing and future preparatory actions and in the specific events proposed;

21. suggests that the Commission should support specific actions for projects that support the promotion of volunteering in sport, directly proposed by local and regional authorities, sport organisations and – where existing – the regional branches of national Olympic committees, service clubs and sports promotion bodies;

### The societal role of sport

22. values the importance that the European Commission has attached to the need to curb doping effectively, not just in competitive sport, since the problem is now increasingly widespread in the amateur sector, posing a serious health risk;

23. believes that one effective measure would be to gain a better understanding of the widespread use of doping practices in amateur sport and subsequently, on the basis of available evidence, first introduce systematic controls and action strategies designed to help reduce the use of doping and other banned substances in non-professional environments and then make penalties tougher, as for narcotic substances. These measures should be coordinated and aimed at the introduction and sharing of good practices in anti-doping strategies in all areas. Regarding the trafficking of doping substances, calls for the EU to sign up to the European Anti-Doping Convention, which recognises the role of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA);

24. emphasises the problem created by differences between the timeframes of sports tribunals and ordinary justice systems; believes that the European Commission should take appropriate legislative action to address this by strengthening criminal law measures against trade in doping substances;

25. advocates introducing a uniform anti-doping system in EU countries, which would also include a minimum number of anti-doping checks both during and outside competitions;

26. stresses the urgency of curbing the scourge of illegal sport betting, which undermines the social and educational role of sport and welcomes the fact that the Commission has already taken action to tackle the situation;

27. welcomes, in particular, the steps taken by the European Commission to support the fight against fraud and corruption in the field of sport, by bringing these activities within Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA on combating corruption in the private sector, as part of a broader anti-corruption package to be delivered in 2011;

28. stresses the importance of action by the European Commission to promote partnerships to facilitate early warning systems against fraud and scandals associated with match-fixing and to fight the possible infiltration of organised crime into European sport, and to encourage Member States to take drastic measures against sport-related fraud offences and to harmonise penalties against them;

29. emphasises the ethical values of sport and in particular the need to teach young people the value of losing and fair play, starting with trainers and technicians, who must teach by example, in order to put a stop to improper and counter-educational incidents, which unfortunately occur frequently at the end of some sports events;

30. shares the European Commission's view that the link between sport and education must be fostered, to harness the benefits of sport with a view to improving people's well-being by preventing health problems, including pathological problems, especially obesity and cardiovascular conditions, which would help reduce long-term health expenditure, which eats very deeply into regional budgets;

31. stresses the importance of raising awareness among all age groups, including children as well as young and older adults, of the need for sport to become an everyday practice; and considers it highly important to make the concept of 'Sport for All' a reality and to steadily increase the popularity of regular physical exercise;

32. stresses that, given the importance of inclusive sports activity, sportspeople and pupils with disabilities must be given the chance to engage in sports daily both at and away from school, and that due attention must be paid in the available support opportunities to fostering and developing disability sport;

33. urges, therefore, national, regional and local authorities to facilitate the daily practice of sports in all schools, free of charge through the provision of adequate infrastructure;

34. advocates measures to strengthen the dimension of sport in pre-school and school curricula;

35. calls for physical education to be started as early as at nursery school and for Member States to create favourable conditions for sports education in schools geared to the

pedagogical, physical and psychological requirements of children and young people; considers, furthermore, that sports education is a core concern of holistic education;

36. urges the need to approve a 'parallel' vocational training for young athletes and especially for younger sportspeople; this requires strict and regular monitoring of the education provided in order to guarantee its quality; considers, furthermore, that this will also communicate moral and educational values, as well as values important for professional sport;

37. advocates greater mobility for sports workers, instructors and trainers, based on common, jointly-agreed standards which are accorded mutual recognition among regions and Member States;

38. advocates promoting and instituting the role of European sport ambassadors for top-level athletes, both during and after their careers in competitive sports;

39. underlines the Communication's failure to focus directly and in detail on the world of volunteering in sport, which constitutes sport's real societal potential;

40. therefore calls on the European Commission and the local and regional authorities to keep a continuous spotlight on volunteering in sport, which can be an effective support for education at all levels by enhancing teaching programmes and serving as a useful tool for lifelong learning; similarly, it can secure substantial support for local and regional authorities and for sports societies in organising events to bring people closer to sport, in a spirit that is emblematic of the non-profit nature of its work;

41. emphasises that voluntary sports activities must promote the principle of solidarity and should therefore be clearly distinguished from highly-paid professional sports activities;

42. expresses the local and regional authorities' desire to increase the societal value of sport, taking advantage of the opportunities the European Commission intends to provide for using the sports-related aspects of the Structural Funds and the support given to the European Cities for Volunteering in Sport project; considers it appropriate to use sport as a valuable means of preventing social tensions and fostering social integration, by setting up small sports facilities to be used free of charge (mini-pitches), especially in socially or geographically disadvantaged areas, with particular regard to small and isolated villages;

43. stresses the societal value of sports initiatives such as the Special Olympics and the Paralympics, which further the social inclusion of people with disabilities, contributing in varying degrees to their personal independence and making them key players and active members of society;

44. reiterates the importance of promoting everyday sports activities among people with disabilities as well, for instance by making contributions to sports associations that undertake sports initiatives for people with a physical, intellectual or sensory disability, toward the cost of buying or replacing the specialised personal equipment required for this type of sport, as well as to the complete removal of architectural features that deny access to facilities where sport is practiced or major events watched; with a view particularly to population ageing, sports facilities and activities on offer should also be increasingly geared to the needs of older people;

45. calls for support for women's participation in sports by creating equal opportunity of access to all individual and team sports, introducing regulations, and ensuring equality of access to financing for women's sports and equal media coverage of women's events for all age groups; calls, further, for women's achievements in the various sports to be given the same recognition as men's and stresses the need for non-discriminatory rules for competitions which would set the same prize money for women and men;

46. advises the European Commission not to neglect the fundamental role played by universities, associations and youth clubs, which have to be involved in order to give sport its proper value;

#### **The economic dimension of sport**

47. emphasises that around 2 % of global GDP is generated by the sport sector and points out that sport, the sports industry and sports tourism, as well as the holding of sporting events have a positive impact on the economy, particularly the tourist and job sectors; also emphasises that these factors are of great importance for job creation and the added value of SMEs;

48. welcomes the European Commission's commitment, through cooperation between Member States, to measure the economic impact of sport through a Sport Satellite Account, which filters the National Accounts for sport-relevant activities to pinpoint all value added related to sport or derived from associated economic activities;

49. recommends that the European Commission involve local and regional authorities in setting up this Satellite Account, as they are able to directly involve both the sporting world and national and European public authorities and academia;

50. argues that it is essential for measures in the sport sector to be financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and by the existing EU framework programmes related to sport and by a suggested EU Sport framework programme to be set up for the next EU budget period; therefore calls for the opportunities under the ERDF to be fully exploited in support of sports infrastructure

and activities and for opportunities under the ESF to be used to improve the skills and employability of workers in the sports sectors;

51. values and endorses the Commission's recommendation that sport associations develop mechanisms for the collective selling of media rights in order to ensure appropriate distribution of revenue, bridging the gap between 'rich' and 'poor' sports, with all due regard for EU rules while maintaining the right of the public to information, by means of financial solidarity mechanisms;

#### **The organisation of sport**

52. calls for initiatives to be launched and supported that have a direct impact on all Europeans, irrespective of their level of sports involvement, such as a European Year of Sport, decentralised European sport festivals, a European Day of Sport. These initiatives would provide a contribution when shaping the European sports policy;

53. points to the need for specific EU financial support to strengthen the European Capital of Sport, launched in 1991 by private citizens and managed by them ever since, and which is continually increasing its impact and visibility across Europe, along similar lines to the European Capital of Culture, the European Green Capital, the European Youth Capital; this would allow it to receive EU support to facilitate its future development and the European Commission's supervision;

54. advocates promotional campaigns and/or sports events in support of key societal issues such as racism and xenophobia, the exploitation of minors, adolescent antisocial behaviour, the fight against all forms of organised crime or even major human rights issues, where sports can promote specific shared EU values through the involvement of major athletes of different generations;

55. stresses the effectiveness – which has, moreover, already proved itself – of a system for international cooperation between police authorities responsible for law enforcement at major sporting events;

56. stresses the need for this police cooperation to be implemented and for its effective and mandatory application to major sporting events taking place in the EU, also where they involve candidate, potential candidate or third countries as well as Member States;

57. welcomes the adoption of measures by some European sport organisations aimed at enhancing financial fair play in European football by ensuring greater respect for internal market and competition rules;

58. urges the European Commission and the Council to study factors which contribute to resolving the issue of match-fixing;



59. asks to be consulted during the European Commission's next consultation on issues concerning the provision of online gambling services.

60. calls for an effective and incisive approach to issues relating to the transfer rules for sports agents;

61. calls for the consequences of rules on home-grown players in team sports to be assessed positively in the light of the recognised specificity of sport;

#### **Cooperation with third countries and international organisations**

62. advocates identifying more clearly the scope for international cooperation in the field of sport, with a focus on countries, candidate countries and potential candidates of the European Union and the Member States of the Council of Europe;

63. emphasises that local and regional authorities, which have established forms of cooperation and twinning with these countries in various contexts, can play a priority role in optimising cooperation through relationships which have already been consolidated over time;

#### **Conclusions**

64. stresses the need to step up the involvement of local and regional authorities on the basis of a joint agenda with the European Commission, the Council and national sports authorities;

65. welcomes the Communication's reference to the local and regional dimension, including support for sport infrastructure and sustainable sporting activities;

66. underlines the environmental side of sport, i.e. the need for EU and regional action to encourage the proper integration

of sports facilities into their setting and environment using eco-friendly building techniques and materials in compliance with stricter rules on energy efficiency; advocates promoting, wherever possible, low-environmental impact sports initiatives, in particular the use of public and human-powered transport, offering various forms of compensation to reduce or cancel out the impact of mass travel on the climate;

67. calls for the Structural Funds to be used to support sports programmes and initiatives insofar as they are closely linked to the Europe 2020 goals (smart, sustainable and inclusive growth). This can maximise the added value of sport as a tool for local and regional development, urban regeneration, rural development, social inclusion, employability and job creation; as a result, local and regional authorities that play a key role in funding and providing access to sport should be more closely involved in EU-level discussions on this issue;

68. advocates working through local and regional authorities to support a university network for the promotion of sport policies;

69. advocates supporting innovative initiatives, in the framework of lifelong learning, to encourage physical exercise in schools, especially between the ages of four and fourteen;

70. calls for the direct involvement of local and regional authorities in an assessment of the economic impact of sports events by setting up a sports monitoring system and database to analyse and gather data on a range of events;

71. calls on the European Commission to involve local and regional authorities and regional branches of national sport organisations and – where existing – the regional branches of national Olympic committees, more closely in the organisation of the EU Sport Forum or annual meetings since these meetings have served as a basis for integrating sport into EU funds, programmes and initiatives.

Brussels, 12 October 2011.

*The President  
of the Committee of the Regions*  
Mercedes BRESSO

---