

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Year of Education through Sport 2004'

(COM(2001) 584 final)

(2002/C 149/06)

On 23 November 2001 the Commission decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 149 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 10 April 2002. The rapporteur was Mr Koryfidis.

At its 390th plenary session on 24 and 25 April 2002 (meeting of 24 April), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 98 votes, with none against and one abstention.

1. Introduction

1.1. 'Sport is a human activity resting on fundamental social, educational and cultural values. It is a factor making for integration, involvement in social life, tolerance, acceptance of differences and playing by the rules. Sporting activity should be accessible to every man and woman, with due regard for individual aspirations and abilities, throughout the whole gamut of organised or individual competitive or recreational sports' (1).

1.2. 'Sporting organisations and the Member States have a primary responsibility in the conduct of sporting affairs. Even though not having any direct powers in this area, the Community must, in its action under the various Treaty provisions, take account of the social, educational and cultural functions inherent in sport and making it special, in order that the code of ethics and the solidarity essential to the preservation of its social role may be respected and nurtured' (2).

1.3. '... in addition to its economic significance, professional and amateur sport has an important educational and social function, fostering a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play, and helping to overcome xenophobia and racism' (3).

1.4. 'The economic developments observed in the area of sport and the responses of the various State authorities and sporting organisations to the problems that they raise do not go far enough to guarantee that the current structures of sport

and its social function can be safeguarded. The increase in the number of court proceedings is the sign of growing tension' (4).

1.5. There will be keen public interest in sports-related matters in 2004. The European Football Championship and, in particular, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens will place top-level sport in the limelight.

The Community has always been attached to the educational values of sport and will thus have an exceptional opportunity to raise the awareness of the governments of the Member States, the education organisations and the sports organisations of the importance of building up an extensive partnership in order to make better use of sporting activities in education.

At a time when professional sport is being excessively commercialised and its image amongst the public tarnished, it is important to restore the true Olympic ideals so that they can help to bring personal fulfilment. The European year will thus contribute to rebuilding the image of sport in European society and to countering the risks of a sedentary way of life and social isolation stemming from the increasing use of new technologies (5).

1.6. 'The Olympic spirit is an unwritten law. A spirit cannot be codified or written down, and it eludes description. It must be experienced.' Ultimately it is an approach to and 'model of living that links culture, sport, education and leisure in an unbreakable whole, in precisely the same way as the education of the ancient Greeks' (6).

(1) Points 3 and 4 of Annex IV of the Conclusions of the European Council in Nice (7, 8 and 9 December 2000).

(2) Point 1 of the above Annex.

(3) European Parliament resolution A5-0203/2000.

(4) COM(1999) 644 final (point 4.1, first paragraph)

(5) Conclusions of the Explanatory Statement of COM(2001) 584.

(6) <http://www.sport.gov.gr> (Ολυμπιακό Φεστιβάλ Νέων)

1.7. 'The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well' (1).

1.8. 'We urge Member States to observe the Olympic Truce, individually and collectively, now and in the future, and to support the International Olympic Committee in its efforts to promote peace and human understanding through sport and the Olympic Ideal' (2).

1.9. 'The generation born between 1985 and 1995 very largely withdraws from the practice of sport requiring permits and self-organised sport. It refocuses on video games and sports simulators which fuel their emotions without risk and without constraint. In 2003, the virtual sport participation rate among 10-25 year-olds already reaches 40 %' (3).

1.10. This patchwork of comments and statements from different sources to a certain extent determines the prevailing atmosphere in relation to sport, as well as the Commission's frame of reference for its proposal to establish a European Year of Education through Sport 2004.

2. The Commission proposal

2.1. In practical terms, with its proposal to establish the European Year of Education through Sport 2004, the Commission is taking an important step to close the gulf that exists between EU social and economic policies and the everyday life of ordinary people.

2.2. First and foremost, the Commission proposal addresses sporting organisations and education.

2.2.1. However, the proposal concerns everybody. It concerns those active in the world of sport as sportsmen and sportswomen, supporters or interest groups. It also concerns those who have, or tend to have, a purely economic interest in sport. And finally, it concerns all those who have a negative view of what is currently happening in sport, in particular of the immoderate and inappropriate activities — for commercial or other ends — that have been gaining ever more ground recently.

(1) Olympic Creed.

(2) United Nations Millennium Declaration (point 10), New York, Millennium Summit held on 6-8 September 2000.

(3) The possibility of sport developing in this way cannot be ruled out (Sport and Employment in Europe: Final Report, PR-div/99-09/C6, IV-2-1, penultimate paragraph).

2.3. In view of the above, the objectives of the European Year of Education through Sport are specific and clear, and can be summarised as follows:

- to make European society more aware of the traditional values, the modern role and the particular educational importance of sport;
- to encourage the world of education and sport to establish and develop a close partnership and joint objectives;
- to promote and exploit the educational potential of sports organisations, especially in terms of voluntary activities, mobility and exchanges, and promoting a smooth introduction to and integration into a multicultural environment without social — or any other form of — discrimination;
- to sensitise the educational community to the current need to address the problems of a sedentary lifestyle by promoting sports at school;
- finally, to address and draw attention to the educational problems that arise with young sportsmen or sportswomen as a result of the increasingly young age at which they start their sporting career.

2.4. According to the Commission proposal, the European Year of Education through Sport is the appropriate Community initiative for achieving the above-mentioned goals. This is especially true, of course, because it coincides with major sporting events — of particular importance in communication terms — such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens and the Euro 2004 football championships in Portugal.

2.4.1. According to the Commission, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens especially will highlight the values and ideals of the Olympics, providing an opportunity for a new general understanding of sports, as well as education, by the whole of European society.

2.5. The legal basis for the proposal is identified as Treaty Article 149, while the funding required to implement it is calculated at EUR 11,5 million.

3. General comments

3.1. The EESC endorses the Commission proposal to declare 2004 the European Year of Education through Sport. It agrees with the Commission's objectives, as well as the urgent need for a comprehensive, well-founded and integrated Community approach to the issue before it is too late. The aim of this initiative is to redefine the environment in which the sporting movement operates and ensure that it is compatible with traditional sporting values and with modern educational and economic needs.

3.1.1. In the light of the above, the comments and suggestions in this opinion are intended to:

- clarify certain points of the proposal;
- put forward ideas, approaches and means for supplementary or even alternative forms of Community action in order to achieve the objectives;
- contribute in practical ways to making the European Year of Education through Sport as successful as possible.

3.2. *The significance of sport*

3.2.1. It is awesome to consider the significance of sport. Specifically, we are talking about:

- an enduring concept that spans virtually the whole cultural spectrum of human history; a human (individual and group) activity that is singular in terms of its historical continuity;
- a social phenomenon that has played a catalytic role in creating a global culture;
- a process that for long periods was the main means of socialising young people and integrating them into the value systems of a particular period and geographical region of the world;
- an important measure of individual development and fulfilment, but also of cultivation of social cohesion;
- a clearly enormous economic significance that cannot be estimated when thought of in terms of the time and effort people have invested, as either participants, supporters or commentators.

3.2.2. The EESC considers sport to be a very serious issue for the future of European society, the European way of life and European culture. It is therefore definitely against any policy that would be incompatible with the values that created sport and made it a major social phenomenon.

3.3. *The context*

3.3.1. The environment in which sport takes place has hardly changed, if at all, for centuries. This environment was basically determined by individual and social needs (health, education, collective activities, discipline, military requirements, etc.), which can be considered survival needs. On this basis, the sporting philosophy which developed was thus strong and clearly unchallenged.

3.3.1.1. The main sphere in which these sporting principles were initially cultivated was always schools and education. Education and sport always existed side by side in a reciprocal relationship.

3.3.1.2. The environment in which sport is practised is today in danger of being completely overturned. The manifest reason for this metamorphosis is the over-commercialisation of sport.

3.3.1.2.1. It is worth noting that sport is now emerging as a fast-growing and profitable sphere of economic activity⁽¹⁾, which has implications in terms of maintaining its traditional character.

3.3.1.2.2. Thus a central issue is how to avert this transformation, so that sport can continue to fulfil its key functions, i.e. in relation to public health, as well as its educational, social, cultural and recreational role.

3.3.2. The EESC is against any idea of accepting a European model of sport that would operate exclusively — even at its margins — on the basis of market principles and for the sole purpose of economic gain. It observes that sport as a social phenomenon is an entity in itself and should be treated as such politically.

3.3.2.1. The organisational structure⁽²⁾ of sport, which has been based on freedom of association and voluntary services, provides the basis for further development of a healthy, mutually beneficial, relationship with education, a relationship that must be enhanced, especially by local authorities. This also requires:

- common objectives (promoting the traditional values of sport, improving people's physical and mental condition, socialisation, etc.);
- attributing roles and work to each side (schools complementing physical activity and sports organisations complementing education: parallel education);

⁽¹⁾ Turnover from sport is estimated at USD 107 billion (USD 15 bn. in grants; USD 42 bn. in television rights; USD 50 bn. in tickets). Europe accounts for 36 % of this figure and the US for 42 %. (See Helsinki Report on Sport. Source: 'Finding the right balance for sport', Stephen Townley, SPORTVISION, magazine of the GAIFS, January 1998).

⁽²⁾ It is estimated that the Union has over 600 000 sports associations.

— transparency and democratic control, and of course shared principles.

3.3.2.2. In view of the above, the EESC considers that commercialised sport is not consistent with the objectives of the European Year of Education through Sport.

3.4. Objectives

3.4.1. The main objective of a single, comprehensive EU policy for sport — in which education will obviously be called upon to play a key role — must be to establish the prerequisites for such a policy to be implemented.

3.4.1.1. Basically, this means taking measures to remove obstacles (institutional, legal, economic and social) hampering the development of such a policy.

3.4.1.2. Of great importance here are measures to promote social understanding and awareness of the issue.

3.4.2. The EESC believes that the European Year of Education through Sport and its specific goals should help to achieve this. It also believes that the significance and seriousness of the issue are such as to call for immediate definition of the broader, medium-term and long-term, objectives of the proposal in question.

3.4.2.1. In view of the above, the EESC perceives a need to frame a more concrete strategy without delay, a strategy that will include the prospect of developing a broad, more or less mass, sports movement that is highly aware and active.

3.4.2.1.1. Developing such a movement will require political support, especially to manage the relevant information and draw attention to the negative implications for the European way of life of unbridled commercialisation of sport and the possible demise of the sporting philosophy. At the same time, this movement must be integrated into a broader social movement, which is already taking shape and addressing the general problem of the future of the European way of life in the 21st century and the new situation created by globalisation and technological developments.

3.5. Sphere of action and means

3.5.1. As the basic instrument for achieving the objectives in its proposal, the Commission favours establishing a partnership between education and sports organisations. However, measures also include action targeted at the whole of European society.

3.5.2. The EESC considers it essential to fully clarify which groups are concerned by the proposal. In its view, since sport and education are individual and group activities, they concern all Europeans — of every age, gender and occupation.

3.5.2.1. Today especially — in an age of high demands imposed by the information society, familiarity with digital technology and the need for Europeans to adapt to new economic and employment conditions — the above comment acquires a particular resonance. It must therefore be made clear that during the European Year of Education through Sport all the interest groups of European society are called upon to work together and play an active part.

3.5.2.2. Whether the objectives of the European Year of Education through Sport have been achieved will not ultimately be judged by the obligatory events in which only specialists take part, or by messages that are not understood by the people to whom they are addressed. Whether they have been achieved will be judged by how well the objectives of the Year are understood at local level and especially by that generation in European society that now holds and exercises any form of power.

3.5.2.3. In view of the above, the aim should be to involve organised civil society and the social partners and all educational organisations (e.g. study groups, night schools, clubs) in the whole process. A further aim should also be to involve local and regional authorities that have considerable leverage potential, both with education systems and with sports associations.

3.6. 2004

3.6.1. The EESC believes the Commission's choice of 2004 to be a good one. The major sporting events of that year (Olympics and Paralympics in Athens, European football championships in Portugal) will really provide a great opportunity; one that is of crucial significance for related measures at grassroots level. Of course the substance of these measures must be considered, as well as how they are to be developed.

3.6.2. The EESC believes that the main aim of measures taken by the EU in this area must be to improve the quality of links between education and sport. This means that during the European Year of Education through Sport there must be a focus on measures relating to the traditional values of sport, as exemplified by the Olympic movement. It also means that the year 2004 will provide an important opportunity to revise the basic educational and pedagogical principles governing European education systems. This will mean finding ways of ensuring that the principles are consistent with the new situation created by modern technology and new education needs relevant to developments in sport.

3.6.2.1. Relating EU measures in the sphere of sport and education to the traditional values of sport and Olympic ideals will be a difficult task, requiring a systematic, comprehensive and large-scale effort. Identifying and promoting these ideals, ensuring that they are understood by the general public, and creating a mass movement to support them are important phases in the project.

3.6.2.2. During the period leading up to the European Year of Education through Sport, important steps can be taken both to identify and promote the traditional values of sport and to ensure that they are understood by the general public. It will suffice if various specific policies are introduced, policies that are supported by the Commission and the other EU institutions.

3.6.2.3. Gearing existing European programmes (EVS, youth, other mobility programmes, etc.) to the objectives of the European Year of Education through Sport could help to promote mobility in the context of links between education and sport.

3.6.2.4. In any event, the EESC emphasises that relevant action can and must be developed at local level if the year is to be a success. It therefore proposes an immediate campaign targeted at every school and every sports association. This will be a message announcing the Commission initiative to establish 2004 as the Year of Education through Sport and calling at the very least on everybody to take steps to ensure that the objectives of the year are reached.

4. Specific comments

4.1. On the basis of the above general comments, the EESC notes that the activities and measures proposed by the Commission (see Article 3 and Annex), and the organisations called upon to support them, should be more clearly defined. More specifically, the activities that the Commission itself intends to develop must be defined; as must the activities that

are to be developed at international, national, regional and local level and the methods of persuading public and private organisations to take their own measures without funding. This could also be presented as an explanatory proposal from the Commission in the run-up to the European Year of Education through Sport, in order to answer the questions of local organisations. In the above context especially, the EESC would like to make the following proposals.

4.1.1. A place for sport in schools

4.1.1.1. The EESC believes that re-establishing sport as an educational activity is an important prerequisite for rethinking the relationship between education and sport. In practice, this means re-ordering the priorities of educational objectives, methods and models — which will ultimately redefine the current way of life of European citizens. This re-orientation provides solutions in particular for children and young people, by giving them a broader choice of more natural and lifelong alternatives than those offered by virtual reality and video games.

4.1.1.2. The EESC also believes that any attempt to change the current relationship between education and sport will succeed only if specific decisions are taken. Of these, the following are important:

- capitalising on the individual affinities and qualities of young people in relation to sport;
- developing pro-sporting networks on the basis of the above individual affinities and qualities;
- developing international and pan-European sports information networks on the basis of schools or local sports groups;
- developing a European dimension of school sports, for instance by organising pan-European school competitions for each type of sport or subject area;
- developing comprehensive electronic networks at European level for purposes of communication and, above all, establishment of all forms of sports mobility.

4.1.1.3. The EESC notes especially the need to relate sport in schools to the current European context and to Europe's future. It therefore proposes that an environment be established in which a European sporting consciousness can be cultivated and developed. This would mean in particular providing incentives for setting up cross-border and international sports teams. 'Second-chance' schools might possibly form the basis for creating the first teams of this type.

4.1.1.4. The EESC notes in any event that sporting activity — especially at the level of sport in schools — must not draw dividing lines of any type or degree. On the contrary, it must create an environment in which every form of conflict or exclusion is reduced.

4.1.1.5. The EESC suggests that the Commission should call upon current experts in the process of promoting 2004 as the European Year of Education through Sport.

4.1.2. A place for mass sport

4.1.2.1. Mass sport deserves particular attention and development with a view to realising the objectives of the Commission's proposals, in order to offset the consequences of the modern sedentary lifestyle — both during working and leisure time. Today more than ever people's physical and mental health depends on sports activity and mass sport. Mass sport of any kind also promotes the personal development and socialisation of participants.

4.1.2.2. To maximise the impact of mass sport, all the relevant parties will have to be involved in developing it. It is important for access to sport to be universal and for all facilities to be available in every location (especially facilities that have received any public sector funding) to ensure the widest possible usage. To this end, it is essential that all those operators and organisations interested in mass sport and its effects should be involved in developing it.

4.1.2.3. The EESC feels that the above participants should include institutions providing tertiary education and lifelong learning, local and regional authorities, public services concerned with issues such as sport, health, education and social and environmental matters, as well as private organisations providing mass sports facilities and services. The aim of cooperation must be to maximise the impact of mass sport on education, health and social attitudes.

4.1.3. Proposals for sport among vulnerable social groups

4.1.3.1. The EESC feels that to be complete, a policy of education through sport must take into serious consideration the current position of socially vulnerable groups in relation to sport in general. The Committee appreciates the activities of many sports clubs in terms of social integration, especially with respect to young people. Such initiatives should be supported and be taken up by clubs that are not involved in this type of activity.

4.1.3.2. The EESC would draw the Commission's attention to the need for European Year measures specifically to:

- help regions that owing to poverty and socio-economic conditions (regions lagging behind in development terms) have not developed any type of individual or collective links with organised sport;
- promote participation of women in sporting activities;
- promote sport for people with special needs;
- bring the whole campaign into a more general policy framework that will promote a culture of healthy living;
- enhance sporting activities that cultivate and promote an attitude of intolerance towards racism and xenophobia.

4.1.3.2.1. With respect to people with special needs in particular, the EESC points to:

- the connection between the European Year of Education through Sport (2004) and the European Year of People with Disabilities (2003);
- the promotion by the European Year of Education through Sport of mass sport for people with special needs;
- the promotion of a closer relationship overall between the organised sporting movement and people with special needs, e.g. through providing access to sports facilities.

4.1.4. The European dimension of education through sport

4.1.4.1. Sport is a particularly appropriate sphere for intergovernmental, international and inter-regional cooperation designed to develop joint education and cultural action plans. The European Year of Education through Sport will provide an opportunity to address the whole issue of creating a European area of learning and education. This is an unresolved problem, despite its ever-growing implications, e.g. for European economic competitiveness.

4.1.5. Towards a new sports ethic

4.1.5.1. The EESC believes that the European Year of Education through Sport will have served its purpose if it creates a climate in which the current situation of sport is challenged, i.e. a situation in which sport is associated with the image of a 'superhuman' athlete who constantly surpasses his or her limits. This is the mythical athlete who exists only at and for the moment of victory. If it proves possible to create

a climate of questioning, especially in schools and among young people, a new sports ethic will certainly be established.

4.1.5.2. The European sports ethic of the 21st century cannot be any different from the ethic required to educate Europeans and imposed by modern society. Thus the new European sports ethic must be sought in the messages transmitted by mass and amateur sports, by the hundreds of thousands of sports associations which are supported by voluntary efforts, by the individual and collective sports that have no links with commercial activities. It is essential to try and generate political support for this sports ethic.

4.1.6. The Olympic Games in Athens: spotlight on Olympic values

4.1.6.1. The Olympic Games in Athens, as a major sports and cultural event, will certainly give the Olympic movement an opportunity that must not be lost. The EESC welcomes and endorses the fact that the basic values of the Olympic movement are being highlighted again. The focus must again be on friendly competition, the Olympic truce, cultivation of the mind, in conjunction with cultivation of the body, as values that could represent a goal of modern European society. In the above context, European society will thus have the opportunity to discuss, highlight and possibly revise some of its positions and views relating to the quality of modern life:

- to demonstrate, agree and emphasise that the issue of 'good living' is more complex and difficult than just ensuring the terms and conditions for survival;
- to demonstrate, agree and emphasise that seeking a good quality of life is a matter for each individual, but at the same time also for everybody together, with all that this

implies in terms of the difficulty of determining what is relevant to quality of life and what is not;

- to demonstrate, agree and emphasise that sporting activity is a major factor determining individual and collective quality of life, while also establishing the conditions for people to live a long — and active — life;
- to demonstrate, agree and emphasise that life does not involve just competition, but also cooperation; indicators are not just quantitative, but also qualitative;
- to demonstrate, agree on and determine the limitations of the modern human being; i.e. what today is human and what is not;
- to demonstrate, agree and emphasise that 'good living' does not necessarily and always mean achieving ever higher quantitative goals; it means above all a consistent and balanced individual and collective effort to achieve learning and education ⁽¹⁾.

4.1.6.2. The EESC feels that the aim is not to promote models from former eras. The aim is to develop an intellectual exchange to explore the factors that lead to certain periods being described historically as 'golden ages'. Once these factors are known, it will certainly be easier for European citizens to identify and agree on a modern lifestyle, the future of Europe and the new forms of governance they will choose, obviously consciously and — why not? — for the long term.

⁽¹⁾ See definition (4) of the term education in footnote one in the Appendix to the Information Report CES 1113/1999 ('The European Dimension of Education: its nature, content and prospects'. Thus education is: 'the product of all factors that influence a person and the social product of education and learning processes, which is expressed actively as a positive attitude to life'.

Brussels, 24 April 2002.

The President
of the Economic and Social Committee
Göke FRERICHS