SPORT

Sport is a field in which the EU’s responsibilities are relatively new, having only been acquired with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009. The EU is responsible for the development of evidence-based policy and for fostering cooperation and managing initiatives in support of physical activity and sport across Europe. In the 2014-2020 period, a specific budget line has been established for the first time under the Erasmus+ programme to support projects and networks in the area of sport.

LEGAL BASIS

Although the Treaties did not mention a specific legal competence for sport before 2009, the Commission laid the foundations of an EU policy for sport with the 2007 White Paper on sport and Pierre de Coubertin action plan.

With the Lisbon Treaty, the EU acquired a specific competence in the field of sport. Article 6(e) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) confers on the EU the competence to carry out actions to support or supplement the actions of the Member States in the field of sport, while Article 165(1) sets out the details of a sports policy, stating that the Union ‘shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function’. Article 165(2) refers to ‘developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest’.

The EU thus has a legal basis to support the sports sector structurally with the Erasmus+ programme and to speak with one voice in international forums and non-EU countries. EU ministers for sport also meet in the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council meetings.

In addition, EU competences in the area of the single market have also had a considerable impact on sport. For example, the European Court of Justice has developed important case-law with major implications for the world of sport (such as the Bosman case). At the same time, the EU has exercised its ‘soft law’ powers in closely related areas such as education, health and social inclusion, through their respective funding programmes.
OBJECTIVES

The existence of a new specific competence in the Treaties has opened up new possibilities for EU action in the field of sport. The EU works to attain greater fairness and openness in sporting competitions and greater protection of the moral and physical integrity of sportspeople whilst taking account of the specific nature of sport. In particular, the EU is concerned with three aspects: (1) the societal role of sport; (2) its economic dimension; and (3) the political and legal framework of the sports sector.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Policy developments


The Commission’s July 2007 White Paper on Sport was the first ‘comprehensive initiative’ on sport by the EU. Through the implementation of the proposed measures, the Commission has gathered useful evidence on issues to be addressed in the future. The White Paper envisioned a number of objectives, including enhancing the societal role of sport, promoting public health through physical activity, boosting volunteer activities, enhancing the economic dimension of sport and the free movement of players, fighting doping, corruption and money laundering, and controlling media rights, among many other goals.

2. Developing the European dimension in sport


This communication was the first policy document adopted by the Commission in the field of sport since the Lisbon Treaty came into force. The communication emphasises the potential of sport to make significant contributions to the overall goals of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs, recognising that sport improves employability and promotes social inclusion. It also suggests that the EU should sign the Anti-Doping Convention of the Council of Europe, develop and implement security arrangements and safety requirements for international sports events, continue making progress towards introducing national targets based on the EU’s physical activity guidelines, and develop standards for disabled access to sports events and venues.

On economic matters, the Commission calls on sports associations to establish mechanisms for the collective selling of media rights in order to ensure adequate redistribution of revenue. Other issues addressed in the Communication deal with sport-related intellectual property rights, promotion of exchanges of best practice on transparent and sustainable sports financing, and monitoring the application of state aid law in the field of sport.


The EU Work Plan for Sport represents the most important document of European sports policy. The first plan was adopted by the Council in its resolution of
20 May 2011[1], and the second on 21 May 2014[2]. The 2014-2017 plan had three priorities: the integrity of sport, its economic dimension and the relationship between sport and society. In order to address these priority issues, the Member States and the Commission established five expert groups on match-fixing, good governance, the economic dimension of sport, health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA), and human resources development in sport.

On 23 May 2017 the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council, in its session devoted to sport, adopted the new EU Work Plan for Sport (2017-2020)[3]. The key topics are:

- The integrity of sport, with a focus on good governance, the safeguarding of minors, combating match-fixing, doping and corruption;
- The economic dimension, focusing on innovation in sport, and sport and the digital single market;
- Sport and society, focusing on social inclusion, coaches, media, environment, health, education and sport diplomacy.

Only two expert groups (on integrity and skills, and human resources development in sport, respectively) will be established, instead of the five in the previous Work Plan, and new working methods will be established, such as cluster meetings.

The Commission was also invited to ensure follow-up to the work of the two previous High Level Groups on Sport and Diplomacy and Grassroots Sport, respectively.

Following a suggestion by the Commission, the duration of the Work Plan was prolonged until the end of 2020, i.e. a total duration of 3.5 years, in order to align it with the Erasmus+ programme and the multiannual financial framework.

In view of the fact that major sports events are attractive opportunities to celebrate the performance, values and benefits of sport in a national and international context, in May 2016 the Council delivered its conclusions on enhancing integrity, transparency and good governance in major sports events. In this document, the Council invited Member States to incorporate integrity and transparency in future work on sport at EU level, to support the implementation of criteria and procedures related to good governance, and to identify and develop models for public-private cooperation and exchange good practices regarding this cooperation.

B. Action programmes

1. Erasmus+

Sport is an integral part of Erasmus+, the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport for 2014-2020. 1.8% of the annual budget of Erasmus+ is dedicated to activities related to sport, with the aim of supporting collaborative partnerships and not-for-profit European sports events. The programme should also contribute

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to strengthening the evidence base for policymaking, i.e. fund studies. Finally, the programme also supports dialogue with relevant European stakeholders.

On 30 May 2018 the Commission published a proposal for a regulation establishing the future Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027), in which sport maintained its share of 1.8% of the overall budget and is now included in key actions 1 (learning mobility) and 3 (support to policy development and cooperation). The proposal was amended and subsequently approved by Parliament in March 2019, and it is now being reviewed by the Council.

2. European Week of Sport

The European Week of Sport is a set of initiatives proposed in the 2012 European Parliament resolution in order to encourage European citizens to take up a physical activity, and the EU supports it through Erasmus+. A Eurobarometer survey showed that 59% of Europeans never or seldom exercise or play sport. As a result, people’s health and wellbeing suffer, as does the economy, with increased spending on healthcare, loss of productivity in the workplace and reduced employability as negative knock-on effects. In order to make citizens more aware of this, every year the EU promotes the European Week of Sports at EU, national, regional and local levels.

3. Sports and migrants

Social inclusion is among the EU’s priorities for the role of sport in society. By bringing people together, building communities and fighting xenophobia and racism, sport has the potential to make an important contribution to the integration of migrants in the EU. The European Commission facilitates the exchange of good practices on the integration of migrants. In September 2016, it published a study examining how sport supports the integration of migrants around Europe. The Commission also promotes projects and networks for the social inclusion of migrants through the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Erasmus+ programme. Projects such as the European Sport Inclusion Network — Promoting Equal Opportunities for Migrants and Minorities through Volunteering in Sport and the Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe are being funded.

Football plays a key role in social inclusion through the involvement of football players’ unions (such as in the Show Racism the Red Card project) or governing bodies such as the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), which has helped the EU in mapping its members’ activities supporting social inclusion of refugees.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Within Parliament, the development of a European sports policy falls under the competence of the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT). Parliament recognises that there is a growing need for the EU to deal with sports matters while fully respecting the principle of subsidiarity, as sport itself is an important social phenomenon and a public good. In 2012, the CULT Committee drafted a report on the European dimension in sport, which paved the way for the European Week of Sport, held for the first time in September 2015. Parliament is also engaged in efforts to reaffirm the social importance of sport. In addition, in its various resolutions, Parliament has addressed the issue of gender equality in sport, as well as active ageing and solidarity between
generations. The key role of sport is also mentioned in the resolution for the integration into the labour market and social inclusion of refugees, underlining the important role of sport as an instrument for fostering social and intercultural dialogue by promoting the establishment of positive links between the local population and refugees and asylum seekers.

Parliament has been very active in the fight against match-fixing and corruption in sport, adopting a resolution on the subject in March 2013. This was followed by a resolution of 11 June 2015 on revelations on high-level corruption cases in FIFA and a resolution of 2 February 2017 on an integrated approach to Sport Policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity. During the plenary in July 2016, the CULT committee tabled an oral question to the Commission on match-fixing, asking for a full commitment to ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions. The Commissioner’s answer underlined the Commission’s support for the Convention as a valuable tool in the fight against match-fixing, as it represents a solid basis for ensuring pan-European coordination and cooperation in that fight. However, cooperation between Member States and institutions is needed in order to ensure that the Convention enters into force in the EU.

Parliament acknowledges the importance of sport for tourism, recalling the important place of sporting activities in making Europe’s regions attractive to tourists, and highlighting the opportunities arising from travel by athletes and spectators to sports events, which can attract tourists to even the most remote areas.

In its amendments to the Commission proposal on the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme, voted on in plenary in March 2019, Parliament proposed re-allocating parts of the Erasmus+ budget to different areas of the programme, in order to ensure that more young athletes and sports coaches have the opportunity to participate in mobility schemes.