

Research for CULT Committee – EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward

Background: Treaty change and policy evolution

The Lisbon Treaty marked an important milestone for sports politics and policies in Europe. The EU was given a legal basis for shaping European sports policies in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) in 2009. This has provided the EU with an **explicit power to act in sport**. Since Lisbon, the EU has had competence to **support and coordinate** activities in sport, but it **cannot pursue harmonisation** or shift competences. The current sports policy activities of the EU institutions are therefore mainly aimed at soft policies such as **fostering exchange and values** in sport as well as developing the European dimension of sport. This is mirrored particularly in **distributive measures** and the allocation of goods and resources.

Despite the limited formal expansion of the EU's competences, the implementation of EU sports policies has provided a **fundamental evolution** to the European dimension of sport. A steadily growing number of public and private actors are involved, more and more sectors and policy areas are covered; enhanced funding and increasingly complex forms of interest representation illustrate the key characteristics of sport-related dynamics and growth at European level. In summary, over the past decade European sports politics and policies have been characterised by **on-going processes of growth and differentiation** while the demand for priorities and suitable forms of coordination has risen.



The present document is the executive summary of the study on *EU sports policy: assesment and possible ways forward*. The full study, which is available in English can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/3cwK44r>

Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies
Directorate-General for Internal Policies

Authors: Jürgen MITTAG, Vincent BOCK, Caroline TISSON, Roland NAUL, Sebastian BRÜCKNER, Christina UHLENBROCK, Richard BAILEY, Claude SCHEUER, Iva GLIBO, Bence GARAMVOLGYI, Ivana PRANJIC

PE 652.251 - June 2021

Key Findings: Institutional and sectoral dynamics

EU sports policy encompasses activities of the EU institutions and the Member States and the activities of the European sporting federations and other European interest organisations and national sporting organisations.

- 1) A key feature of European sports politics and policies is a continuing **horizontal differentiation of public and private stakeholders**. While for many years European sporting federations made sport-related decisions largely autonomously, today, leagues and clubs, players' and coaches' representatives, players' advisors and various agencies have entered the scene. Since the 1990s, a growing number of private actors have established sports-related, special-purpose associations at European level seeking to influence sport in Europe.
- 2) In addition to the number of actors, **sectoral growth and differentiation** can be identified as a second key feature of European sports politics. Today, there are hardly any sport-related sectors that are not covered by activities at European level. This study explores these policy sectors against the backdrop of four structural dimensions: the political dimension, the economic dimension, the socio-cultural dimension and a transversal dimension referring to pressing challenges.
- 3) The increasing activities at European level and the growing number of actors involved have led to a widening **procedural differentiation** in sports politics. More and more actors with more varied interests have led to an increasing complexity in procedures and possibilities for participation in decision-making on sport.
- 4) The **Member States**, which were initially not very receptive to the transfer of competences on sport to the European level, have recognised in several ways the benefits of Europe-wide coordination of public interests in sport, beyond the direct access of the federations. They are **committed to and constructively engaged** in European sports policy, particularly within the Council.
- 5) **Interinstitutional cooperation** in sport between the Council, the Commission and Parliament has become more structured, yet there is still a lack of regular cooperation in terms of formal arrangements and procedures.
- 6) Societal changes have led to public and private actors being confronted with **ongoing debates on the multidimensional roles, function and character** of physical activity and sport at European level.
- 7) In light of the International Skating Union decision of the European Commission and the most recent related ruling of the European Court of Justice, the debate on the future of **the European sport model** and its specificity based on the principles of solidarity, inclusivity and voluntary work remains a relevant topic.
- 8) Though the conflict between autonomy and intervention in sport continues, a fissure seems to have emerged in the relationship between the interests of traditional (non-profit) **sporting organisations** and **commercial providers** in the industry.
- 9) Even though the increased attention paid to sport at European level has led to a central commonality among the actors, this did **not result in uniform reaction patterns** and adaptation processes.

- 10) European sport politics and policies are neither fixed in institutional nor procedural terms, nor in sectoral perspectives, but are **subject to ongoing changes in the light of individual case decisions**.

Recommendations: Coordination, Prioritisation, Parliamentarisation, and Information

Based on the observations and data of this study, four core areas with recommendations for the future of European sport politics and policy have been identified:

The **first area** covers the need to revise the field in view of coordination and cohesion, **and the adoption of a more holistic approach**. Since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, European sports politics and policies have been fundamentally redefined and further developed in the past decade. However, this ongoing differentiation has not led to greater visibility and efficiency and thus has not improved the (output) legitimacy of European sports policy. **A key recommendation is to improve coordination**. Both intra and inter-institutional cooperation must be enhanced. There should also be greater consultation with sporting federations and specialist stakeholders in sport and the Member States. Against this background, it seems necessary to strive for structural adjustments in the sense of a general refinement **embedding sport in political, economic and social development strategies and programmes**. Exploiting broader cross-sectoral linkages and mainstreaming sport into other relevant EU policies is a key tool in ensuring greater cohesion in this first core area.

The **second area** is aimed at the **policy fields**. Even though only rudimentary overarching recommendations for action can be made here and each field deserves to be dealt with in its own right, which cannot be done within the framework of a general recommendation, the corresponding proposals are intended to underpin the importance of some particular fields. After more than 10 years of dealing with sport anchored in primary law, core areas are emerging that should be given special attention in terms of profiling and priority setting. Consequently, this study proposes not only to consider the scope of EU sports policies further, but also to pay particular attention to the following four pillars: integrity, physical activity, health and education. In addition, the challenges caused by COVID-19 need to be addressed. On this basis, an action plan should be drawn up with tangible support mechanisms.

The **third area** addresses the **parliamentary perspective** and the **role of the European Parliament (EP)**. In the past, the EP has managed to anchor the European dimension of sport in the public consciousness through hearings and debates as well as policy initiatives and statements. However, the CULT Committee could improve its current performance in sports policy by tabling issues relating to sport and sports services on the agenda more often. Both **horizontal cooperation of the CULT Committee** with other standing committees on sport matters and **vertical cooperation with national parliaments** could be increased. In terms of proactive policy advice, the EP should make far greater use of the expertise of sporting federations and organisations. Considering the role of parliaments as a forum and an advocate for public debates on sport, the EP should provide a framework to establish **regular communication on sport**.

Finally, the **fourth area** encompasses the necessity to create the basis for successfully developing European sports policy in a lasting and sustainable manner by **expanding and deepening the**

knowledge and information base and including all Member States in the studies. Moreover, improved access to existing materials on the development of sport at European level should be offered while encouraging a broader dissemination of existing studies on sport. **An annual report on European sports (policy) development** published by the European institutions would be an important instrument for improving access to information and data. In addition, specialised transnational and comparative studies covering a larger number of Member States and organisations could be undertaken in the future to offer deeper insights into European sports policy.

In the sixth chapter, this study offers **12 key recommendations** for the core areas listed here. Further recommendations and actions are subsequently provided for each area, which take into account the high degree of sports policy development that has already been achieved at European level.

Further information

This executive summary is available in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Polish. The study, which is available in English, and the summaries can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/3cwK44r>

More information on Policy Department research for CULT: <https://research4committees.blog/cult/>



Disclaimer and copyright. The opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2021.
© Image on page 1 used under the licence from Adobe Stock

Research administrator: Katarzyna Anna ISKRA Editorial assistant: Anna DEMBEK

Contact: Poldep-cohesion@ep.europa.eu

This document is available on the Internet at: www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses