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 was 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 EU 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 the 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 support or supplement the actions of the Members 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 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 introduction of a new specific competence in the Treaties 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, while taking account of the specific nature of sport. Furthermore, the EU supports the idea that sport can improve general well-being, help overcome wider societal issues such as racism, social exclusion and gender inequality, and provide significant economic benefits across the Union. Furthermore, sport policy is considered an important tool in the EU’s external relations. 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

1. The White Paper on Sport and the Pierre de Coubertin action plan

The Commission’s 2007 White Paper on Sport was the first ‘comprehensive initiative’ on sport by the EU. Through the implementation of the proposed actions, the Commission gathered useful evidence on issues to be addressed in the future. The White Paper envisioned a number of objectives, including, among others:

— 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.

2. Developing the European dimension in sport

The Commission’s White Paper on Sport and the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 paved the way for the Commission communication of January 2011 on the impact of the Treaty of Lisbon on sport, entitled ‘Developing the European Dimension in Sport’. This communication was the first policy document adopted by the Commission on sport after the Lisbon Treaty came into force. The communication emphasised the potential of sport to make significant contributions to the overall goals of the ‘Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs# (2010-2020), improving employability and social inclusion. It also suggested 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, 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 called 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 dealt with sport-related intellectual property rights, exchanges of best practice on transparent and sustainable sports financing, and monitoring the application of state aid law in the field of sport.
3. The EU Work Plan for Sport

The EU Work Plan for Sport is one of the most important EU documents on sports policy. It focuses on the Union’s key activities in the field, and acts as a guidance instrument for the promotion of cooperation between EU institutions, Member States and sports stakeholders.

The first Work Plan for Sport (2011-2014) was adopted by the Council in 2011 and its successor in 2014. The 2014-2017 plan laid out three priorities: (1) the integrity of sport, (2) its economic dimension, and (3) the relationship between sport and society. In order to address these, 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.

In May 2016 the Council adopted its conclusions on enhancing integrity, transparency and good governance in major sports events, inviting Member States to incorporate integrity and transparency at EU level in the future work plan, support the implementation of criteria and procedures related to good governance, and to identify and develop models for public-private cooperation and exchange of good practices.

On 23 May 2017 the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council adopted the third EU Work Plan for Sport (2017-2020), whose key priorities reflected those of the previous plan. The third plan established only two expert groups (on integrity and on skills and human resources development in sport), introduced new working methods such as cluster meetings, and prolonged the duration of the plan to a total of three and a half years in order to align it with the Erasmus+ programme and the multiannual financial framework.

On 1 December 2020 the Council of European Ministers of Sport adopted the fourth EU Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024). Physical activity has a prominent place in the plan, with investment in sport and health-enhancing physical activity, including the creation of sport opportunities for all generations, listed as a key priority. The plan also aims to strengthen ‘the recovery and the crisis resilience of the sport sector during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic’. Other key action areas include the prioritisation of skills and qualifications in sport through best practice exchanges and knowledge building, the protection of integrity and values, as well as the socio-economic and environmental dimensions of sport and the promotion of gender equality. The EU also aims to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions and coaching, to promote equal conditions for all athletes, and to enhance media coverage on women in sport.

In line with the EU’s green transition, ‘green sport’ also figures as a priority, as the plan proposes the development of a common framework with shared commitments taking into account the European Climate Pact. Further emphasis is put on innovation and digitisation in all areas of the sports sector.

4. The COVID-19 pandemic and sport

On 22 June 2020, the Council adopted its conclusions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sports sector, proposing different measures for its recovery. The document highlighted how the entire sector was severely hit, including in economic...
terms, as the pandemic had devastating consequences on sport activities at all levels. The Council stressed how pandemic and post-pandemic resumption strategies at local, national, regional and EU are needed in order to support the sports sector and maintain its important contribution to the well-being of EU citizens. Among other things, the Council encouraged Union institutions to supplement national efforts by channelling financial support to the sector through available EU programmes and funds, such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, the Cohesion Policy funds and the Corona Response Investment Initiatives (CRII, CRII+). Furthermore, the Council emphasised the need to promote a dialogue between Member States and relevant stakeholders to discuss strategies to allow sports activities to start again in a safe and - where possible - coordinated manner, and to prevent future crises, enhancing the resilience of the EU sports sector.

On 1 December 2020, EU Sports Ministers held a conference on the current challenges of organising international sporting events. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, athletes' freedom of movement is being hampered by different and constantly evolving national rules on testing, quarantine, and other health-related issues. The debate showed the need for further exchange and cooperation at EU level in the sports sector.

On 10 February 2021, Parliament adopted a resolution emphasising the need to provide Member States with financial, strategic and practical support in order to avoid the pandemic having lasting effects on youth and sports. The resolution stressed that financial aid should not be limited to major spectator sports events, and that recovery measures are of utmost importance for grassroots sport. Furthermore, the Commission was asked to develop a European approach to tackling the negative effects of the pandemic on the sports sector.

B. Action programmes

1. Erasmus+

Sport is an integral part of Erasmus+, the programme for Union action in the field of education, training, youth and sport. On 12 December 2020, Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement on the Commission’s proposal on the future Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027). The agreement stressed the importance of promoting a European dimension in sport that should be complementary to and consistent with the EU Work Plan for Sport (2021-2017), and raised funding for sport to 1.9% of the overall budget of the programme.

Promoting ‘learning mobility of sport staff, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies’ was emphasised as one of three key objectives of the new Erasmus+ programme. Actions to attain this objective include, inter alia, fostering mobility, especially for staff in grassroots sports, and increasing virtual learning possibilities, creating partnerships for cooperation and exchanges of best practices, including small-scale partnerships, fostering wider and more inclusive access to the programme, and supporting non-profit sporting events that promote issues of relevance to grassroots sports. The provisional agreement still needs to be approved by Parliament and the Council.
2. **European Week of Sport**

An EU-wide 'European Sport day' was first proposed by Parliament in its February 2012 resolution on the European dimension in sport. In September 2015, the European Week of Sport (EWOS) was launched, with the aim of promoting sport and physical activity across Europe at national, regional and local levels, encouraging European citizens build a better, healthier lifestyle. As a 2018 Eurobarometer survey showed that 59% of Europeans never or seldom exercise or play sport. As a result, people’s health and well-being suffer, as does the economy, with increased spending on healthcare, loss of productivity in the workplace and reduced employability.

Since 2017 the EWOS has been held between September 23 and 30 all across Europe, with Member States and partner countries organising a wide range of activities and events. In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 42 countries participated and 32,617 events took place. Furthermore, to address the impact that movement restrictions might have on sports and physical activity, the European Commission developed the #BeActiveAtHome campaign.

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 can make an important contribution to the integration of migrants in the EU. In September 2016, the Commission published a study examining how sport supports the integration of migrants around Europe, mapping good practices around the EU. The Commission also supports projects and networks promoting the social inclusion of migrants through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and the Erasmus+ programme. Projects such as the European Sport Inclusion Network (Spin), and the Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe (SIVSCE) or Fairplay are funded by the EU.

Football plays a key role in fostering 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**

In Parliament, the development of a European sports policy falls under the competence of the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT). Parliament recognises the 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, Parliament adopted a resolution on the European dimension in sport, which paved the way for the European Week of Sport. Parliament is also engaged in efforts to reaffirm the social importance of sport. In addition, in its various resolutions, Parliament has addressed the issues of gender equality in sport, as well as active ageing and solidarity between generations. The key role of sport is also mentioned in the 2016 resolution on 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 establishing positive links between the local population and refugees and asylum seekers.

Parliament’s Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) has regularly discussed human rights in the context of large sporting events hosted in countries such as Russia (Winter Olympics 2014), Brazil (FIFA Men’s World Cup 2014, Summer Olympics 2016), and Qatar (FIFA Men’s World Cup 2022). Following a first hearing on sports and human rights focussing on the situation of migrant workers in Qatar in February 2014, a joint hearing on human rights violations in connection with large sporting events was held in 2015 together with the CULT Committee.

Parliament has also 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 in June 2015 on revelations on high-level corruption cases in FIFA and a resolution in 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 also acknowledges the importance of sport for tourism, recalling the important role 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 attract tourists to even the most remote areas.

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

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