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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE  
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE  
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**on the implementation and relevance of the European Union  
Work Plan for Sport 2014-2017**

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**A) INTRODUCTION**

Following the inclusion of sport in the Lisbon Treaty and in line with article 165 TFEU, the European Union (EU) and the Member States have strengthened their cooperation in an effort to develop further the European dimension in sport. Cooperation has focused on those areas where the EU can add value to the activities carried out by the Member States and support their actions. Over the past decade, sport has become a policy field impacting the EU's overall ambitions in terms of economic growth, more and better jobs and an inclusive society, contributing to the implementation of the priorities set in Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>1</sup> and the Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the Commission, together with the Member States, has placed an increased emphasis on tackling challenges within sport related to good governance, integrity and social inclusion, and on promoting the benefits of participation in sport and physical activity.

As a continuation of the successful implementation of the first European Union Work Plan for Sport (2011-2014)<sup>3</sup>, the Council adopted a second European Union Work Plan for Sport (2014-2017)<sup>4</sup> in order to promote and develop sport policy at European level. Within this framework, the Commission and the Presidencies of the Council, together with the Member States, have worked in close cooperation focusing on the themes of "integrity of sport", "economic dimension of sport" and "sport and society", in full respect of national and EU competences. Sport organisations and stakeholders have also been directly associated to the implementation of this EU Work Plan.

The second EU Work Plan for Sport defines priorities and outlines a list of requested outputs to be delivered,<sup>5</sup> as well as the corresponding working structures, notably Expert Groups.

The Commission was tasked to adopt, by November 2016, at the final phase of the Work Plan, a report on its implementation and relevance, as a basis for the preparation of a possible third EU Work Plan for Sport during the first half of 2017.

This report reflects the Commission's view on this implementation and assesses the broader political impact of the Work Plan. It also takes into account written contributions submitted

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2010) 2020 of 3 March 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The political guidelines set by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, on 15 July 2014.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 162, 1.6.2011

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 183, 14.6.2014

<sup>5</sup> Annex I of the EU Work Plan for Sport

by Member States as well as experts and observers participating in the Expert Groups. In addition, it includes recommendations for a possible future EU Work Plan for Sport.

## **B) EVALUATION**

The Commission made its evaluation of the implementation of the second EU Work Plan for Sport on the basis of a questionnaire<sup>6</sup>, inputs from various stakeholder meetings and events, and spontaneous contributions. The analysis of the information received showed that the second Work Plan has met expectations. However, some areas for improvement have also been identified.

### **1. Working methods and structures**

Following the adoption of the second EU Work Plan for Sport, the Commission set up five Expert Groups<sup>7</sup> composed of Member States' appointed representatives to look at particular areas related to sport policy and help achieve the requested outputs. Interested stakeholders, upon request and with approval of Member States representatives, were able to participate as observers in the meetings of these Groups (see Annex 1). It has been the Commission's role to closely work with and assist Member States in implementing the Work Plan.

The Expert Groups started their work in the second half of 2014. Each of them has followed its own work schedule to deliver specific outputs in accordance with the timetable outlined in the Work Plan. The requested outputs were designed to pave the way for possible future EU level activities and to shape national policies.

Beyond the work to be undertaken by the five Expert Groups, the EU Work Plan indicated that other structures and working methods could be used, including Presidency conferences, meetings of Sport Ministers and Directors, Commission studies and conferences, as well as pledge boards.

The Sport Directors had the particular task to exchange best practices and ensure peer learning in sport.

A structured dialogue with sport organisations took place in the form of different meetings and events. This included the annual EU Sport Forum and the meetings which took place in the margin of each Council.

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<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire was sent to Member States and Member States' experts as well as to observers participating in the Expert Groups. It included questions on the implementation, work arrangements, relevance and results of the EU Work Plan, and suggestions for the future. 105 responses were received. They were complemented with information gathered during meetings and conferences (such as the EU Sport Forum, The Hague on 9-10 March 2016). Spontaneous written contributions were also received from various stakeholders.

<sup>7</sup> Expert Group on match-fixing; Expert Group on good governance, Expert Group on the economic dimension, Expert Group on health-enhancing physical activity, Expert Group on human resources development in sport.

From 2014 to 2016, 2 informal meetings of Sport Ministers, 9 Presidency events and conferences, and 5 Sport Directors meetings have taken place. Furthermore, 8 Commission studies have been published to support and drive forward the implementation of the Work Plan. Preparatory work on a pledge board has also been undertaken.

## **2. Outputs**

The second EU Work Plan for Sport, in its Annex I, defines 16 outputs in key areas to be delivered by a certain target date and indicates the corresponding working structures. The outputs cover sport in all its dimensions (social, economic, organisational). All outputs have either been delivered or are in the process of being completed by the end of 2016 or early 2017. The table annexed to this report outlines the status of each of these deliverables (see Annex 2).

It is worth highlighting a few areas where particular good progress has been achieved:

- To prevent and fight match-fixing the relevant Expert Group brought together all interested parties, enabling developments to be shared in a timely manner in light of the Macolin Convention<sup>8</sup> which had been adopted prior to the beginning of the Work Plan.
- Concerning good governance in sport, the relevant Expert Group clarified the extent to which EU principles were implemented, and also identified ways forward on a possible pledge board, culminating in the recent launch of a pledge on good governance by the Commission.
- Regarding health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) the relevant Expert Group collected and shared good practices to promote physical activity in the Member States, informing the definition and implementation of policies and action plans at national level. Through the monitoring framework of the Council Recommendation on HEPA, Member States reported the adoption of 37 new policies and action plans since 2013, across all the sectors relevant for HEPA (on a total of 152 policies and action plans), highlighting the usefulness and timely relevance of these exchanges of good practices.
- The Expert Group dealing with sport's economic dimension specifically focused on the economic benefits of sport, the legacy of major sport events and the sustainable financing of sport. To measure and illustrate the sector's economic impact, further progress was made in the field of Sport Satellite Accounts (SSAs). Meanwhile eight Member States (AT, CY, DE, LT, NL, PO, PT, UK)<sup>9</sup> and Switzerland have national SSAs; LU and RO are finalising their national SSAs, whereas a few other MS have started reflections and negotiations with their National Statistical Office.

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<sup>8</sup> Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions; <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/215>

<sup>9</sup> <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/sport-satellite-accounts-pbNC0213236/>

- The Expert Group on human resources facilitated the sharing of good practices between Member States. Moreover, it discussed national strategies for Dual Careers of athletes and contributed to the preparation of sectoral qualification frameworks with reference to National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Furthermore, sport received recognition at political level as one of the ways to increase the employability and social inclusion of young people.

### 3. Assessment

The first EU Work Plan for Sport had generally been considered successful by Member States, the Commission and most stakeholders. Subsequently, the second EU Work Plan was largely a continuity of the first one, with an adaptation of priorities and a slight reduction in the number of the Expert Groups (5 instead of 6). The assessment of this second EU Work Plan shows that ensuring continuity was the right approach even if for the future some reorientations should be considered.

The written contributions submitted in response to the questionnaire indicated that overall the activities carried out under this Work Plan led to good results in the defined priority areas. The vast majority agreed that the Work Plan focused on the right priorities (91%), that it improved cooperation between the EU and the sport movement (69%) and that it improved political coordination on sport at EU level (69%). 70% agreed that the Work Plan introduced appropriate structures and working methods while 26% did not agree. Asked if the Work Plan led to fruitful outcomes for the policy process, 61% agreed while 29% did not. 46% of contributors agreed that the Work Plan has improved cooperation between Member States and the sport movement at national level, while 38% did not.

In relation to the work of the Expert Groups, the vast majority took the view that the Expert Groups played a key role in implementing the Work Plan (85%). There was wide agreement that the Commission provided relevant expertise to the work of these Expert Groups (84%) and adequate logistical and secretarial support to their work (90%). In relation to the outcomes of the Expert Groups, 56% agreed that they had an impact on the sport sector while 32% believed that the outcomes did not.

The majority of contributions indicated that the EU Work Plan for Sport had a positive impact for the sport sector (80%) and that it was important for the development of sport policy at EU level (93%). In relation to the impact on the development of sport at national level, 64% believed that the Work Plan was relevant while 26% believed that it was not. Asked if the Work Plan had an impact on sport policy outside the EU, opinions were divided (34% vs 33%).

Taking into account the written comments of Member States, it appears that:

- Concerning the *duration* of the EU Work Plan for Sport, most answers indicated that the current 3-year duration is appropriate. However several answers also suggest that a longer duration of up to 4 years would be suitable too, while only a few indicated that a 3-year period is too long;

- The *arrangements related to the Expert Groups* were considered as working well. Several respondents suggested that having a more focused approach, with less topics to deal with, less Expert Groups and less meetings would be an improvement for a future Work Plan for Sport;
- The participation of *observers* in the works of the Expert Groups was an issue of concern in many responses. A widespread remark was that some observers had the tendency to promote their organisation's views instead of keeping a neutral approach;
- The *outputs* requested from the Expert Groups were often too numerous and the topics to deal with, especially for some of the Expert Groups, were too broad. Several comments suggested having a more focused scope of the work of the Expert Groups and less output requested.
- The EU *structured dialogue* with sport organisations could be improved from its current form. Most acknowledged the yearly EU Sport Forum as the main and valuable event in this context. Some doubts have been expressed concerning the real added value of the structured dialogue meeting taking place in the margins of the Council in its current format.

The Commission's assessment confirms in many regards the main remarks expressed during the consultation process. First of all, the Commission considers that this second EU Work Plan for Sport has been successful in the sense that all requested outputs have been delivered with a good level of quality. The working methods have proved to be efficient in generating a permanent dialogue with stakeholders and Member States on key European sporting issues. The Expert Groups have been a privileged place for networking. They have allowed for increased cooperation between Member States and sport organisations. Different policy fields such as HEPA or good governance have directly benefited from the works undertaken at Expert Groups level.

The Commission also considers that the *impact of the outputs* has not always been significant. Some outputs, such as the ones on major sport events and the one on physical education in schools, have fed the policy-making process, in particular Council Conclusions<sup>10</sup>. Some have also been used in conferences, seminars or awareness raising events. However, others have not been really valorised after being delivered to the Council. Moreover, there is so far only limited information on how far they have influenced or been effectively used in national policy making.

Furthermore, from a logistics perspective, the *organisation of the large number of Expert Groups' meetings* has been demanding. Similarly, it has been challenging for Member States

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<sup>10</sup> Council conclusions on enhancing integrity, transparency and good governance in major sport events, adopted by the Council on 31 May 2016;  
Council conclusions on the promotion of motor skills, physical and sport activities for children, adopted by the Council on 24 November 2015.

and the Commission to ensure participation in these Expert Groups. Not all Member States were able to be represented in the meetings on a regular basis.

The Commission considers that there was a contradiction between the ambitious scope of some Expert Groups and the need to benefit from specialised expertise in a given field. The extent of the mandate given to some Groups (Good Governance, Human resources) has led to heterogeneous groups in terms of expertise. De facto, the broad scope of the Expert Groups' mandates did not always allow Member States to appoint representatives having an appropriate level of expertise. On the contrary, in the Commission's view, observers have most of the time brought added value in terms of specific knowledge.

The Commission also considers that the diversification of the working methods, i.e. going beyond the Expert Groups, would have contributed to better implementation of the EU Work Plan for Sport.

## **C) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

The Commission believes that several improvements could be considered for a future EU Work Plan for Sport in order to make it more relevant and impactful. The Commission's recommendations refer to the general principles, priorities and working methods.

### **1) General principles**

First, *a clear duration* for the next EU Work Plan for Sport should be established. Although the duration of the first and second Work Plans was not specified explicitly, they effectively spanned over a period of three years. However, taking into account the preparatory phase of a few months and the evaluation exercise and negotiating period for the next EU Work Plan for Sport of over 6 months, the actual active work is de facto limited to a period of two to two and a half years.

Accordingly, the time to achieve the requested outputs was limited. This generated some time pressure to produce a number of outputs and did not allow adapting to new circumstances and emerging challenges. It could therefore be considered appropriate to extend the duration of a possible future EU Work Plan in order to maximise the benefits and improve further the outcomes of the work. The added-value of a longer duration also lies in the possibility that it offers to align the Work Plan with the priorities defined at EU level, as well as with the EU multiannual financial framework (MFF).

In the meantime, given that 2020 represents a milestone year in many ways, the Commission recommends any third EU Work Plan for Sport to last until the end of 2020, coinciding *inter alia* with the end of the current MFF. The possibility of a longer duration should be kept open in the future.

Second, *more flexibility* should be introduced to adapt the EU Work Plan for Sport during its implementation. It would be important to consider possibilities to adjust the ongoing work

under the EU Work Plan for Sport to evolving circumstances, such as, for instance, the unprecedented refugees' crisis Europe is currently facing or the major challenges related to violent radicalisation. Also, a less rigid approach in terms of topics covered would effectively allow responding when appropriate to developments in the field of sport. The flexibility that such an approach would bring, would help ensure the added value of EU level work in the field of sport.

Third, the need for *increased interaction with other policy fields* that have a strong impact on sport (e.g. competition, freedom of movement, employment, data protection, education and training, health) should be taken into account in a future EU Work Plan for Sport. The Commission and Member States could further develop cross-sectorial cooperation and ensure that other EU policy domains are involved more closely with the specific issues related to sport. Safeguarding a more holistic approach to European sport policy and mainstreaming sport in other policy areas would be useful to help ensure delivering added value in the field of sport at EU level. Sport policy cannot work in isolation; cooperation and complementarity with other relevant policies are essential.

Fourth, *synergies with the Erasmus+: sport programme* could be reinforced, inter alia by contributing to the identification of sport specific priorities for the Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme, and by ensuring stronger links between the EU Work Plan and the selection of projects. At the same time, the outcomes of selected Erasmus+ projects could feed the sport policy priorities ("bottom-up approach"). Moreover, it could be worth considering synergies with other EU financial instruments.

## **2) Priorities**

Competences in the area of sport lie with the Member States. Only the added value of cooperation at EU level should therefore justify the inclusion of a subject in the EU Work Plan. The role that the EU can play to contribute to address existing challenges in sport should be a central concern when deciding the inclusion of a topic in the future EU Work Plan. This should probably result in the reduction of the number of priorities.

The Commission suggests to better link the priorities included under the future EU Work Plan with the *political priorities* set out by the European Union, such as growth and jobs, including employability of young people, social inclusion and integration of refugees, climate change, the skills agenda, etc. in order to increase the political impact of the EU Work Plan. Cohesion Policy instruments can also play a role in supporting projects for sport, in view of promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, particularly among marginalised communities.

Ensuring continuity of priorities previously defined should be contemplated in the future EU Work Plans to build up on the work already done. In addition, a stronger *focus on implementing* the practical outcomes and existing results (e.g. EU guidelines, policy recommendations, pledge boards) achieved under the first two EU Work Plans, including a light monitoring of the progress made in that respect, is highly recommended. At the same time, stronger links with current problems in the sport world (e.g. data protection, human



rights, major sport events, doping, corruption, etc.) should be sought, including possibilities to join efforts at an EU level to react on such topical issues.

Without being exhaustive, possible priorities to be included in the future EU Work Plan for Sport include the *use of sport in the EU's external relations, good governance, the promotion of grassroots sport and the strong link of physical activity with health promotion and disease prevention*. The Commission also recommends considering using the future EU Work Plan for Sport to address the *economic dimension of sport* and to improve the *evidence base on sport*<sup>11</sup>, including work towards greater recognition of the sector's contribution to the economy<sup>12</sup> and its beneficial effects on society.

The Commission considers that a future EU Work Plan for Sport should also be a tool to promote the *positive values of sport, including its health-enhancing effects*, and should avoid focusing only on negative aspects of sport activities. The Commission also suggests using a future EU Work Plan to support Member States' efforts to promote innovative answers to complex phenomena such as marginalisation, exclusion and lack of participation.

The Commission believes that the definition of priorities to be addressed by a future EU Work Plan could benefit from a *dialogue between EU institutions, Member States and relevant sport stakeholders, and also including relevant social partners*. The European Parliament should be more closely associated to the implementation of the future EU Work Plan for Sport, for instance through regular reporting, sharing of information with respective Parliament structures, and participation in selected meetings and events.

Finally, better coordination and clearer connection between the work done under the EU Work Plan for Sport and the rotating EU Presidencies would improve the usefulness of the outcomes of our work. A stronger link should be ensured between the outcomes of the EU Work Plan and the priorities of the Member States chairing the EU Presidency during the course of the EU Work Plan for Sport.

### **3) Working methods**

To build on the positive experiences of the first and second EU Work Plans for Sport and, at the same time, address the challenges identified, the Commission sees value in a revised form of working methods that would allow relevant actors to cooperate effectively while covering the priorities included in the context of a new EU Work Plan for Sport.

First, the EU Work Plan should offer the possibility to include *different working methods*, in addition to the traditional Expert Groups that might, in some cases, still be considered the most appropriate means of cooperation. Possible additional working methods to be considered

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<sup>11</sup> This would further complement work on sport statistics carried out by Eurostat in the domain of employment, international trade and participation,

<sup>12</sup> In this respect, the Commission has already launched a study, funded by the COSME programme, which will support such a priority. This study aims to improve the economic and policy knowledge of the sport-related industries and formulate recommendations on how to boost competitiveness and adapt relevant legislation.

could include conferences, platforms, seminars, studies, Commission Expert Groups, peer-learning and exchange of good practices. Better clarification of the expected outcomes at expert and policy level will drive the choice of the most appropriate working method.

Second, the production of a written document should not necessarily be assumed to be the only valuable outcome. Sometimes the process in itself can be considered as a desired outcome. The production of a written document would derive its value from the anticipated need and use by the sport community at large, or a clearly defined need by the Council. In other terms, the requirement for any written documents to be produced should be made clear. It is in general highly recommended to considerably reduce the *number of written documents* to be produced compared to the first two EU Work Plans.

Third, while the running of the Expert Groups under the EU Work Plans for Sport demonstrated important benefits, the Commission believes that the cooperation at EU level would benefit from making use of a wider variety of working methods, in particular to facilitate and monitor the *mainstreaming of sport* in relevant EU policy areas and EU funding programmes.

Fourth, a mechanism which would allow topics of current interest to also be dealt with in some manner could be considered. Such a mechanism could take the form of *annual stakeholders meetings*, platforms or seminars, involving the Member States and the sport movement and which could measure the progress made on a regular basis.

Fifth, the EU *structured dialogue* with sport organisations should be developed. The central place of the EU Sport Forum should be maintained and reinforced. In general, the place and role of sport organisations in the future EU Work Plan for Sport should be strengthened. The structured dialogue meeting taking place in the margin of the Council should be reconsidered in order to allow broader participation of Member States and organisations. The organisation of specific cluster meetings on different policy areas involving, among others, selected Erasmus+ projects, experts and other sport stakeholders could be considered in order to promote further grassroots sport in Europe.

Finally, while it is clear that some working methods envisaged should allow exchange of views between Member States only, a high and coherent level of *representativeness of the sport movement* in the preparation and implementation of the EU Work Plan for Sport should also be ensured, as appropriate. While the Commission considers that the added value of observers in the Expert Groups has been demonstrated, it should also be recognised that the number of organisations involved should be more restricted to those with a clear connection to the topic. A selection process of participating organisations, based on activities and representativeness of the sport movement, should be put in place. Similarly, more focused topics for any future Expert Groups would help ensure adequate representation at both Member State and observer level, and subsequently appropriate knowledge of the subject matter at hand.