



REPORT

In the framework of consultations leading to a possible White Paper on Sport, the Member of the Commission responsible for sport, Mr Ján Figel', met with European sport federations to discuss governance issues on 20 September 2006. A background paper had been sent out to federations on 30 August.

Commissioner Figel' underlined the Commission's willingness to consult all stakeholders involved in European sport and stressed the societal and economic benefits of sport as well as the Commission's readiness to help create the most favourable environment for the development and promotion of sport in the EU. Commissioner Figel' explained the need to launch a political initiative which could take the form of a White Paper and stressed the importance of governance issues in ensuring that interaction between the European Union and the sports movement brings positive results for European sport.

The Director General of DG EAC, Ms Odile Quintin, chaired the meeting. Together with the Director responsible for sport, Mr Pierre Mairesse, she presented the calendar of consultations both within the Commission (inter-service meetings, possible debate in the College of Commissioners before the end of the year) and externally (Sport Directors meeting in Naantali on 4-6 October 2006, Sport Ministers Conference in Brussels on 27-28 November 2006, on-line consultation directed at European citizens to be launched in October 2006). Reasons for the focus on governance were presented (legal challenges, presentation of the Independent European Sports Review) and the results of the 29-30 June 2006 Consultation Conference with the sport movement were commented upon by the Commission's representatives.

Mr José Luis Arnaut, chairman of the Independent European Sport Review (IESR), made an opening presentation on elements of sport governance beyond football. Presentations were made by the following European sport federations: International Basketball Federation, European Squash Federation, International Ice Hockey Federation and European Athletics Association. Representatives of more than 30 European sport federations and organisations took part in the meeting and voiced their views on governance in sport. The European Olympic Committee and the International Olympic Committee stated that the IESR does not represent the Olympic movement's views and stressed that the issue of governance should be dealt with by sport organisations themselves.

Most participants welcomed the possibility of a White Paper on Sport in Europe and outlined ways in which the EU could help in promoting good governance in sport, while insisting upon the need to respect the autonomy of sport organisations and the specific characteristics of sport in Europe.

While some - mainly team sports' – federations endorsed the IESR and its proposals as a concrete example of how to implement the Nice Declaration on the Specific Characteristics of Sport (2000), other federations insisted upon the specificities of football and its problems as compared to other sports in Europe. The Commission reaffirmed that the Review and its proposals were independent from the Commission, but that it was studying them with interest.

All participants agreed on the need to recognise sport's specificities in Europe and to preserve its autonomy, but not everyone agreed on the existence of a unique European sports model. In particular, it was pointed out that large numbers of people engage in non-competitive sports, which do not match the concept of a European sports model. A need for clarification and for the definition of sport activities was expressed.

All parties agreed that each sport had its specificities and deserved to be treated differently according to these. There was consensus, supported by the Commission, that governance was mainly the responsibility of federations themselves (and Member States as legislators) and that the European Union should not impose general rules applicable to all European sports. However, most participants agreed that the EU could play a role in helping to develop a common set of principles for good governance in sport, drawing on previous work such as the "Rules of the Game" conference in 2001.

A number of participants pointed out that attention should be paid to the situation of federations with limited administrative capacity, and to the need to avoid imposing upon them heavy constraints in terms of overhead and other administrative costs. Some federations pleaded for the elaboration of guidelines, or a model, for statutes that would ensure good governance and compatibility with European law, as long as such guidelines, or model, would not be mandatory.

All participants agreed upon the need for greater legal stability and clarity in the field of European sport, in view of recent and upcoming cases before the European Court of Justice. The Commission was asked to provide guidelines on activities and practices which could be considered compatible with EU law. The need for a regular information and consultation process was expressed, as well as for the recognition of national and European governing sport bodies as counterparts in dialogue at EU level. The need for a structured forum for discussion and exchange of experience was also expressed.

Attention was called to a number of issues arising from the interaction between the EU and the rest of the world. Most European sport federations' membership is wider than that of the EU and European federations act within the framework provided for by international sport federations. Specific issues needed to be considered, such as the interaction between national and EU rules and those of international federations, the participation of non-EU sportspeople in competitions held on EU territory, the composition of national teams (incl. the issue of home-grown players rules), and the fiscal and legal problems of federations having their seats in EU countries.

Other areas for possible EU action were identified by some federations, such as sports agents' activities, the protection of minors in sport, betting in sport, doping (the Commission was called upon to appeal to Member States to sign the UNESCO anti-doping convention as soon as possible), preservation of the rights of sportspeople and of equal access to sport practice (leisure and competition), and the promotion of sport in schools and for young people.