



## EU should grab sports policy opportunities, say MEPs

Committees: Committee on Culture and Education

**The EU should make more active use of its Lisbon Treaty powers to promote the social and educational benefits of mass sports, said many speakers at a European Parliament public hearing on Thursday. Others raised farther-reaching ideas, such as holding a European Olympics or setting up a young athletes exchange programme.**

Opening the hearing, committee chair Doris Pack (EPP, DE), urged the EU "to grab new opportunities" arising from the Lisbon Treaty. She regretted that the Commission had withdrawn a proposal for sport support programmes in 2012 and 2013, and called on Parliament to be more proactive in this area.

### Possible EU sports programme - only from 2014

European Commission representative Gregory Paulger said the Commission would soon present a communication on sports policy. The EU should not substitute for national or regional efforts, but should promote the social and educational functions of sports, stimulate cross-border activities, ensure fairness and openness in sports competitions and foster research, particularly on doping, he said. The speaker informed that the Commission would consider proposing an EU sports programme from 2014, although securing a budget for it might require some effort.

"Sports organisations need the EU to tackle common challenges", observed European Olympic Committees President Patrick Hickey. He said that existing EU programmes should pay more attention to sports, and also suggested organising European Olympic Games.

### Amateurs versus professionals

"Solidarity and representation are the main features of the European sports model", stressed William Gaillard, advisor to UEFA President Michel Platini, observing that professional sport has become "more competitive and less social", yet it represents only 1% of all people practising sports. "Sport in Europe is becoming less elitist and more universal", argued International Sport and Culture Association President Mogens Kirkeby. He suggested setting a goal of involving 100 million more EU citizens in sport by 2020.

"EU attention should be focused on amateurs and not only on professionals", agreed Michele Colucci, Professor of Sports Law at Tilburg University, The Netherlands. He suggested creating a European Sports Law and Policy Observatory and setting up an "Erasmus Sports Programme" to facilitate the exchange of young athletes. This idea was backed by many MEPs.

### Need for EU funding

"If we set ambitious objectives, we need funds", stressed Petra Kammerevert (S&D, DE). Emma McClarkin (ECR, UK) advocated securing sufficient EU funding for grass-roots sports, while Silvia Costa (S&D, IT) suggested seeking private funding, such as lotteries, in addition to public money. Emil Stoyanov (EPP, BG) called for more proactive policies to promote mass sports, adding that professional sport should be regarded as "big business". Timo Soini (EFD, FI) suggested using the European Year of Volunteering 2011 for that pur-

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pose. Meanwhile, Ivo Belet (EPP, BE), stressed that both amateur and professional sports clubs need EU support, and proposed devising a strict licensing system and compensation possibilities for clubs "investing in local talent".

EU support for sports could show citizens that "the EU is also about fun", thought Helga Trüpel (Greens/EFA, DE). Meanwhile, Committee chair Doris Pack stressed that EU action in the field of sports is important, as "we cannot just leave everything to competition". Rather than trying to achieve too much, she suggested focusing on a few achievable goals.

In the chair: Doris Pack (EPP, DE)