

Role of sport in education

2007/2086(INI) - 13/11/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 590 votes in favour to 56 against with 21 abstentions a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Pál SCHMITT (EPP-ED, HU) reaffirming the EU's legitimate interest in sport, in particular its social and cultural aspects, as well as the educational and social values that sport transmitted such as self-discipline, challenging personal limitations, solidarity, healthy competition, respect for opponents, social inclusion, opposition to any form of discrimination, team spirit, tolerance, and fair play. Members stressed that, in our multicultural society, sport can and should be an integral part of formal and informal education. Studies had shown that regular physical activity improves mental and physical wellbeing, while having beneficial effect on learning abilities. They also stressed the significance of implementing the Amsterdam and Nice declarations, especially the specific characteristics of sport in Europe and its social function account of which should be taken when implementing common policies.

Accordingly, Parliament called on Member States to ensure that greater stress was placed on health development in school and preschool teaching programmes by encouraging specific forms of physical activity suitable for the latter age group and raising awareness within clubs and associations in order to ensure that children start physical activity at the earliest possible age and hence to guarantee PE status in accordance with the profile of the institution and the corresponding level of study.

Parliament pointed out that sport and physical activity could make an important contribution to combating negative health trends such as a sedentary life-style and obesity, and stressed the important role of sport for public health, especially in the fight against obesity that currently affected 21 million children in the EU. It urged Member States to carry out information campaigns aimed at children from a very early age and their parents on the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle, and engage in regular physical activity and on the health risks linked to an unhealthy diet. Parliament proposed that the work of the group of experts involved in the 'EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health' set up by the Commission be reinforced through the participation of PE educators and sport experts. Parliament welcomed the Commission White Paper on sport, and hoped that the issue of school physical education will form part of the 'Pierre de Coubertin' Action Plan. It recommended a series of measures to encourage physical activity.

Member States were called upon to:

- make PE compulsory in primary and secondary schools, and to accept the principle that the timetable should guarantee at least 3 PE lessons per week;
- promote body awareness and healthy development through a higher degree of integration between sport and academic subjects;
- modernise and improve their physical education policies, principally to ensure that a balance is struck between physical and intellectual activities in schools;
- invest in quality sports facilities and take appropriate measures to make sports premises and sports curricula at schools accessible to all students, with proper regard being paid to the needs of disabled students;
- ensure the teaching of PE at all levels, including primary school, by specialised PE instructors;
- in the spirit of the Bologna process, to step up convergence between training programmes for PE teachers at each school level;
- in cooperation with physical education colleges, to provide high-quality, all-round education, equipping athletes with all the necessary skills to enter the employment market or pursue their studies in higher education institutions and beyond;
- provide physical education teachers with training in the issue of gender by including this aspect in their curriculum. Members called for an end to the downgrading of the status of physical education as a subject and of the status of PE teachers;
- encourage the option of having either sports coeducation or single sex classes from secondary level onwards in order to encourage girls to try out sports traditionally practiced by men;
- carry out a study of quantitative and qualitative participation of girls and boys in sport within and outside schools and to provide the necessary resources to further expand the sports on offer and thereby increase the participation of girls in sports;
- ensure equality of opportunity by taking steps to put an end to any discrimination which might arise on the grounds of gender, religion or ethnic origin;
- promote cooperation, and improve the exchange of information and exchanges of best practice examples, between schools and out-of-school sports associations, local authorities, voluntary and civil society organisations which run sporting activities;
- actively support forms of physical activity which can be carried out by families, and to improve the dialogue between parents, PE teachers and sports associations;
- ensure that sports facilities are designed for easy access by disabled spectators and/or participants;
- pay particular attention to situations in which children's talent is exploited with a view to success in sports competitions.

Parliament welcomed the inclusion of a direct and unambiguous reference to the social, cultural and economic value of sport, which forms the basis of the legal framework for future Community action, in the text of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, as set out in the draft Treaty of Lisbon. It proposed that the EU Public Health Programme pay more attention to raising awareness of the prominent role played by education, physical education and sport in the area of public health. The report welcomed the Commission's White Paper on 'A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues', which identified prevention, primarily by means of the promotion of exercise and an increase in the numbers of participants in sport, as a priority. (Please see [INI/2006/2231](#)). It also welcomed the achievements of the European Year of Education through Sport (EYES 2004), which stressed the role of sport in education and drew attention to the wide-ranging social role of sport. Parliament welcomed the decision of the International Olympic Committee to hold the Youth Olympic Games as of 2010, and felt that sports education and training, with a particular emphasis being placed on Olympic ideals, was an effective instrument for the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and multicultural dialogue, and for the promotion of voluntary work. Sports education played an active part in counteracting discrimination, intolerance, racism, xenophobia and violence.

The Commission was called upon to undertake a series of measures, while taking full account of the subsidiarity principle:

- draw on the experiences of the 'sports-minded schools' programme initiated by the Luxembourg Presidency and to devise, in cooperation with the Member States, a uniform set of criteria for the award of this label, as well as the conditions for a European

- sports prize to be awarded to acknowledge new initiatives;
- identify best practices in the fight against sexual harassment and abuse in sport;
- initiate multi-disciplinary research in the field of sport and PE, and to disseminate best practice. Basic principles should be defined for the pan-European survey on physical education policies and practices which the Council of Europe has defined as a priority;
- devise clear guidelines on rules for state support, setting out what type of state support is regarded as acceptable and necessary in the interest of successfully fulfilling the social, cultural, health protection and educational functions of sport;
- identify areas where EU action could provide added value with regard to action already taken by sports organisations and Member States authorities. The report considered that the open method of coordination was an appropriate way to achieve better cooperation at European level in the specific area of physical education policy and sport for all;
- EU structural funds should be used for the creation and development of school and other sports facilities in disadvantaged areas;
- building on the experiences of EYES 2004, in the framework of the Lifelong Learning, Youth and Europe for Citizens programmes, to devise new initiatives aimed at heightening the profile of the role played by sport and PE not only in education and culture point of view but also in terms of social integration and health protection;
- promote the European mobility of PE teachers and trainers, as part of the Lifelong Learning Programme.

Parliament applauded the work of volunteers in all sporting organisations and recognised that most of these organisations could not exist without volunteers. It recommended that 'credits' or some form of reward for voluntary service be put in place at European level in order to promote and give greater recognition to this work.

Lastly, and on the issue of doping, Parliament stressed that the use of performance-enhancing chemical substances was contrary to the values of sport as a social, cultural and educational activity. It called on Member States to ensure that PE teachers inform pupils about the physical and psychological dangers inherent in the use of doping substances.