

Council conclusions on the role of voluntary activities in sport in promoting active citizenship

(2011/C 372/06)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING:

- The Joint Declaration by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on 5 May 2003 on 'the social value of sport for young people' ⁽¹⁾.
- The Council Decision 2010/37/EC of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) ⁽²⁾, which stresses the following objectives:
 - working towards an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering in the EU,
 - empowering volunteer organisations and improving the quality of volunteering,
 - rewarding and recognising volunteering activities,
 - raising awareness of the value and importance of volunteering.
- The Council conclusions of 18 November 2010 on the role of sport as a source of and a driver for active social inclusion ⁽³⁾.
- The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on 'Developing the European dimension in sport' ⁽⁴⁾, and the 2010 study on 'Volunteering in the European Union', which provide evidence of a very high degree of diversity in volunteering in sport across the EU and focus on legal arrangements and sources of financing in this field, also drawing attention to the need for the training of volunteers.
- The communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on EU policies and volunteering: 'Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU' ⁽⁵⁾.
- The Resolution of 20 May 2011 of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a European Union Work Plan for Sport for 2011-2014 ⁽⁶⁾.
- The Council conclusions of 3 October 2011 on the role of voluntary activities in social policy ⁽⁷⁾.
- The Expert Conference 'From volunteering to leadership in sport', held on 13-14 September 2011 in Warsaw, Poland, during which special attention was given to the following issues:
 - the legacy, heritage and experience of major sport events and how they can be subsequently exploited in day-to-day voluntary activities in sport,
 - the possibilities of using the already existing pools of volunteers in the recruitment process for forthcoming sport events,
 - the need to support recognition and validation of voluntary activities in sport,
 - the need to encourage mutual learning and exchange of best practices.

ACKNOWLEDGES THAT:

1. Having due regard to the particularities of the situation in each Member State and of all forms of volunteering, the term 'voluntary activities' refers to all types of voluntary activity, whether formal, non-formal or informal, which are undertaken of a person's own free will, choice and motivation, without concern for financial gain. They benefit the individual volunteer, communities and society as a whole. They are also an instrument allowing individuals and associations to address human, social, intergenerational or environmental needs and concerns, and are often carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative ⁽⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 134, 7.6.2003, p. 5.⁽²⁾ OJ L 17, 22.1.2010, p. 43.⁽³⁾ OJ C 326, 3.12.2010, p. 5.⁽⁴⁾ COM(2011) 12 final.⁽⁵⁾ COM(2011) 568 final.⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 162, 1.6.2011, p. 1.⁽⁷⁾ Doc. 14061/1/11 REV 1.⁽⁸⁾ Council Decision 2010/37/EU of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (see footnote 2).

2. Voluntary activities need to be clearly distinguished from paid employment and should by no means replace it⁽¹⁾. They should not perpetuate gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work and may not encourage any reduction of employees' working time or withdrawal of employees from the labour market.
3. Voluntary activities cannot replace the overall responsibility of the state to ensure and provide economic, social and cultural rights.
4. To ensure the rule of law and full respect for the integrity of the individual, voluntary activities must be subject to existing legislation and fully respect universal and fundamental rights and freedoms.
6. Voluntary activities in sport promote positive social attitudes based on values developed through sport, such as:
 - fair play,
 - teamwork,
 - persistence,
 - responsibility,
 - leadership,
 - tolerance,
 - respect for others, and
 - the ability to overcome obstacles.

CONSIDERING THAT:

1. Sport is the biggest civil society movement in the EU. Non-profit activities and structures based on voluntary activities are a fundamental condition for the provision of sport in the majority of Member States.
2. Voluntary activities in sport are among the most attractive and popular forms of social activity in Europe and are part of the social heritage of sport. The organisation of sporting events — including those organised by professional and commercial sporting bodies — as well as day-to-day activities carried out in sport in many Member States rely on volunteers and voluntary activities.
3. Voluntary activities in sport contribute to active citizenship and to the integration of citizens with different backgrounds by creating better understanding and respect through the universal language of sport as well as contributing to the implementation of the basic values and principles of the European Union, namely: solidarity, sustainable development, human dignity, equality and subsidiarity, thus promoting European identity.
4. Engaging in voluntary activities in sport provides citizens with new skills, thereby contributing positively, among other things, to their employability and strengthening their sense of belonging to society, and can be a catalyst for social change.
5. Voluntary activities in sport can contribute to the growth and strengthening of social capital through the development of a social network based on trust and cooperation.
7. The sport sector, together with voluntary activities in sport, constitutes a measurable and significant economic and social value in national economies, with potential to stimulate growth and employment rates throughout the European Union.
8. Promoting the development of voluntary activities in sport pursues the objectives of the European Year of voluntary activities 2011 and continues to fulfil the goals of the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion 2010 as well as contributing to the objectives of the European Year of active ageing 2012.
9. Voluntary activities in sport can act as an impulse for the development and promotion of physical activity at all levels, bringing with it improvement in the well-being of citizens and reducing lifestyle diseases.
10. Voluntary activities in sport are significant as a factor contributing to the mobility of citizens through building competences and deepening experience within sport-related activities in other Member States as well as developing the European identity and promoting EU values beyond its borders.
11. Voluntary activities in sport can contribute to achieving the overall objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy by increasing mobility and through activities enhancing employability, improving public health, promoting social inclusion, education and active ageing.

⁽¹⁾ Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 16 May 2007 on implementing the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people (OJ C 241 of 20.9.2008, p. 1).

IN THIS CONTEXT, INVITES EU MEMBER STATES AND SPORT STAKEHOLDERS, ACTING WITHIN THEIR COMPETENCES AND HAVING REGARD TO THE AUTONOMY OF SPORTS ORGANISATIONS, TO:

1. Create favourable conditions for the development of voluntary activities in sport on the basis of, in particular:
 - the exchange of good practices between Member States and sports organisations,
 - respect for the autonomy of sports organisations, while ensuring adequate support for these organisations at Member State level,
 - the need to ensure that sports volunteers are offered the necessary training and given the opportunity to enjoy safely the benefits of volunteering.
2. Contribute to promoting a positive image of sports volunteers and of voluntary activities in sport.
3. Consider voluntary activities in sport as an important tool for raising competences and skills. To this end, there is a need to:
 - take appropriate steps to identify the competences and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning experiences relating to voluntary activities in sport, and study the possibilities for their greater recognition and validation within the framework of national qualification systems, with reference to the European qualifications framework (EQF),
 - seek consultation with the sports movement and volunteering organisations in the preparation of action.
4. Encourage cooperation between government authorities and sports organisations at local, national and European level, in order to establish networks for solving common problems that voluntary activities face.
5. Promote voluntary activities in sport as a form of non-formal and informal learning with a view to acquiring new skills and competences as well as constituting a part, along with formal education, of a dual career for athletes.
6. Promote voluntary activities in sport by, for example initiating publicity campaigns to increase awareness and promote positive attitudes towards volunteers.
7. Harness the potential of volunteers engaged in the organisation of sporting events in long-term activities at all sporting levels.

8. Explore the possible added value of establishing a reward system that recognises the most innovative voluntary projects in the field of sport.

ENCOURAGES EU MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, ACTING WITHIN THEIR COMPETENCES AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY AND TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THEIR INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE, TO:

1. Strive to eliminate undue obstacles to the development of voluntary activities in sport, including undue administrative burdens.
2. Study the development of sports based on voluntary activities within the European Union, including research on its economic and social impact.
3. Exchange knowledge, experience and best practices in the field of voluntary activities in sport.
4. Promote the development of voluntary activities in sport in national and European policies and strategies concerning sport and social affairs, education and employment.
5. Explore the possibilities for voluntary activities in sport to contribute to projects subsidised from EU funds and develop mechanisms to allow for appropriate appraisal of voluntary activities in sport.
6. Incorporate, where appropriate, aspects of voluntary activities in sport into the activities of different expert groups established in accordance with the EU Work Plan for Sport.
7. Encourage the development of voluntary activities in sport through cross-sectoral cooperation between public and private entities and civil society organisations in the areas of sport, health, culture, education, youth and social policy at local, national and European level.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

1. Give specific attention to voluntary activities and to the ability of non-profit making sport organisations to access the next generation of EU programmes, without prejudice to negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework.
2. Identify success factors, best practices and areas requiring closer cooperation at EU level, including existing obstacles to the development of voluntary activities in sport.
3. When proposing new EU legislation, assess its possible impact on voluntary activity in sport.