

# EU SPORTS POLICY: ASSESSMENT AND POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD



Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has had competence to **support and coordinate** activities in sport, but it **cannot pursue harmonisation** or shift competences. The current sports policy activities of the EU institutions are therefore mainly aimed at soft policies such as **fostering exchange and values** in sport as well as developing the European dimension of sport. This is mirrored particularly in **distributive measures** and the allocation of goods and resources. A steadily **growing number of public and private actors** are involved, more and more **sectors and policy areas** are covered; **enhanced funding** and increasingly complex forms of interest representation illustrate the **key characteristics of sport-related dynamics and growth at European level**.

## The study

With the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is entitled to support, coordinate or complement Member States' activities in sport. European sports policies of the past decade are characterised by numerous activities and by on-going differentiation. Against this backdrop, the study presents policy options in four major key areas.

## Main observations

A key feature of European sports politics and policies is a continuing **horizontal differentiation of public and private stakeholders**. Since the 1990s, a growing number of private actors have established sports-related, special-purpose associations at European level seeking to influence sport in Europe.

In addition to the number of actors, **sectoral growth and differentiation** can be identified as a second key feature of European sports politics. Today, there are hardly any sport-related sectors that are not covered by activities at European level.

The increasing activities at European level and the growing number of actors involved have led to a widening **procedural differentiation** in sports politics.

The **Member States**, which were initially not very receptive to the transfer of competences on sport to

the European level, have recognised in several ways the benefits of Europe-wide coordination of public interests in sport, beyond the direct access of the federations.

**Interinstitutional cooperation** in sport between the Council, the Commission and Parliament has become more structured.

Societal changes have led to public and private actors being confronted with **ongoing debates on the multidimensional roles, function and character** of physical activity and sport at European level.



In light of the most recent related ruling of the European Court of Justice, the debate on the future of **the European sport model** and its specificity based on the principles of solidarity, inclusivity and voluntary work remains a relevant topic.

Though the conflict between autonomy and intervention in sport continues, a fissure seems to have emerged in the relationship between the interests of traditional (non-profit) **sporting organisations** and **commercial providers** in the industry.

Even though the increased attention paid to sport at European level has led to a central commonality among the actors, this did **not result in uniform reaction patterns** and adaptation processes.



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European sport politics and policies are neither fixed in institutional nor procedural terms, nor in sectoral perspectives, but are **subject to ongoing changes in the light of individual case decisions**.

## Conclusions and policy recommendations

Four core areas with recommendations for the future of European sport politics and policies have been identified:

The **first area** covers the need to revise the field in view of coordination and cohesion **and the adoption of a more holistic approach. A key recommendation is to improve coordination**. There should also be greater consultation with sporting federations and specialist stakeholders in sport and the Member States. Exploiting broader cross-sectoral linkages and mainstreaming sport into other relevant EU policies is a key tool in ensuring greater cohesion in this first core area.

The **second area** is aimed at the **policy fields**. This study proposes not only to consider the scope of EU sports policies further, but also to pay particular attention to the following four pillars: **integrity, physical activity, health and education**. In addition, the challenges caused by COVID-19 need to be addressed. On this basis, an action plan should be drawn up with tangible support mechanisms.

The **third area** addresses the **parliamentary perspective** and the **role of the European Parliament**. Both **horizontal cooperation of the CULT Committee** with other standing committees on sport matters and **vertical cooperation with national parliaments** could

be increased. The EP should provide a framework to establish **regular communication on sport**.

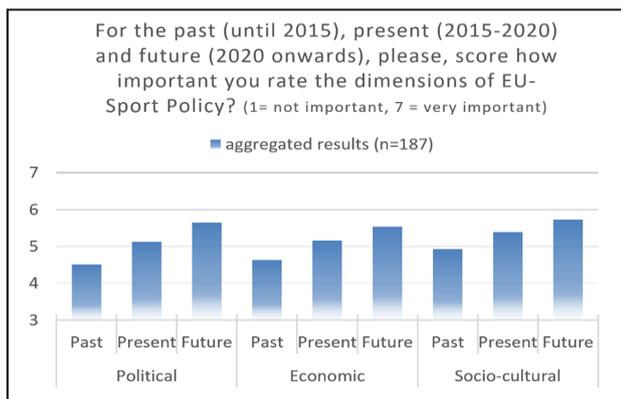
The **fourth area** encompasses the necessity to create the basis for successfully developing a European sports policy in a lasting and sustainable manner by **expanding and deepening the knowledge and information base** and including all Member States in the studies.

### Key areas for EU action

1. Improve coordination and greater consultation with sporting federations, specialist stakeholders and Member States
2. Consider the scope of EU sports policies further and pay particular attention to integrity, physical activity, health and education
3. Increase cooperation between the EP standing committees on sport matters and national parliaments
4. Expanding and deepening the knowledge and information base
5. Publication by the European Institutions of an annual report on European sports (policy) development

**An annual report on European sports (policy) development** published by the European institutions would be an important instrument for improving access to information and data.

**Fig: Importance of the 3 dimensions of sport over time**



Source : EP study on EU sports policy

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