



EU Sport Forum 2008, Biarritz, 26 November 2008

25 Nov 2008

Second session: Support for grassroots sport in Europe

Mrs Birgitta Kervinen, ENGSO President

Mr Chairman

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Sports Friends,

The European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation ENGSO represents 40 National sports confederations and Olympic Committees both within and outwith the EU. The work related to European sports policy is one of ENGSO's main priorities.

Constant dialogue in order to facilitate a platform for discussion between sport federations, —the European institutions —and political decision-makers has been one of the main aims of ENGSO. ENGSO would like to express its appreciation to the European Commission for re-launching the EU Sport Forum.

At this phase —when the White Paper on Sport is being implemented and there is provision for sport in the Lisbon Treaty — a discussion of all stakeholders - representing sport from grassroots to top level - is of the utmost importance. And it is our wish that this will continue as an annual meeting point in the future as well.

ENGSO Perspectives on Support for grassroots sport in Europe

Regarding ENGSO's Perspectives on Support for grassroots sport in Europe —I would like to underline ENGSO's priority: —equal opportunities for participating in sport. The aim of ENGSO is that every European citizen will have an opportunity to be physically active and to have open access to participate in the various activities of sport clubs. This can only be guaranteed through strong public funding for sport.

Well-being through physical activity is a major concrete goal for Europeans. The challenge is to involve people of all ages in sport clubs activities. Both public or low cost sport facilities —and direct public support for the non-profit voluntary sport clubs are needed.

As mentioned in the excellent draft text of the EU Physical Activity Guidelines of the EU Working Group Sport and Health, —a physically active lifestyle requires a nation-wide system of cost-effective sport facilities. A main feature is that basic sport facilities should be situated near to residents. It is important that the fees for the sport clubs should be low enough for everyone to participate. In addition, stronger co-operation between sport clubs, schools, homes, the private sector and politicians needs to be developed – this is in addition to education for sport leaders at all levels. Removing certain administrative barriers for grassroots sport is also needed, as stated in the French study on financing.

ENGSO considers it is important for sport to obtain a European Union budget line and future preparatory actions for sport in 2009. We also urge the mainstreaming of sports in the existing EU funding programmes and sports recognition in the Structural Funds and the European Social Fund.

Voluntary structures of European sport

The activities of the 700,000 sport clubs in the EU Member States is based largely on the voluntary non-profit work of its members. Recognition of voluntary work as one of the specific and vital features of European sport structure is essential. Voluntary work as the main contributor for grassroots sport is most significant.

Regarding taxation, —in all cases voluntary work of non-profit work of sport clubs should definitely be free of tax. Because there are many differences in Europe on VAT in sports between states, national decision making would still be necessary.

ENGSO also underlines the importance of the European pyramid sport structure and solidarity, as stated in the EOC and IOC position on the specificity and autonomy in sport. ENGSO is in complete agreement with this and urges that the whole pyramid structure need to be carefully considered when decisions are made in sport. Our strong wish is to continue the work of the Working Group of the EU Member States for non-profit sport organisations.

ENGSO Study on Sport Financing

A small-scale survey study on public and national financing was undertaken by ENGSO in 2007. We analysed the financing of sport in 22 countries – most of them EU Member States. A major result of the study was that funding from national public authorities and lottery and gambling is most important. The publicly secured funding from state-run and state-licensed gambling operators are the most significant contributors to sport.

As European Lotteries and Toto Association reported in 2006: State lotteries in the EU Member States channelled 33 % of their turnover to good causes and governmental taxes while private gaming operators paid less than 3 % of their taxes to the government. Moreover, ENGSO believes that gaming operators which are owned and tightly controlled by the government - because they have close relationship with public authorities - are the more reliable partners for sport when it comes protecting the integrity of sporting competitions, keeping them free from any improper influence associated with sports betting.

Consequently, ENGSO agrees with the European Parliament report on the White Paper on Sport. ENGSO stresses the importance of continuity of the national decision making in the area of gambling or lottery services and voices its concern against potential deregulation of the national gambling markets. Any change in this structure will have a serious impact. This will be even more the case in the current international financial crisis and would have an influence on daily life of grassroots sport and European citizens, if it were changed.

The European Parliament elections will take place in June 2009. For sports club members it is important to have the active participation in the elections and for sport organisations to put sports issues into the agenda. This is a good example of Active Citizenship. ENGSO will support its members in this process.

Dear Colleagues; Thank you for your attention.