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Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union
Philippe Muyters, Minister for Sport

With copies to:

The representatives of the Member States of the European Union,
European Commission, Council of the European Union

Subject: Structured dialogue in the field of sport

Helsinki, 16 September 2010

Dear Minister,

The structured dialogue, as outlined in the Commission White Paper on Sport of 2007 and later developed further, has been welcomed by the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation ENGSO. Regular meetings with representatives of the EU institutions and Member States together with the EU Sport Forum have proven useful in relation to an exchange of views on European policy making, and have without a doubt contributed to preparing an even better framework for a new European Sport Policy.

While expressing its content with the establishment of a structured dialogue, ENGSO would like to point out certain aspects which cannot be ignored with regard to the future of this dialogue in the new policy framework. With the autonomous governance structures in sport, dialogue between sport organisations and institutions of the European Union and the representatives of the Member States continues to be of paramount importance in order to implement a successful EU Sport Policy. The outcomes of the structured dialogue should also be respected in the decision-making processes that follow.

Sport on a European level is organised in diverse structures, where different organisations emphasise often equally important and yet different aspects of sport, from grassroots sports to professional sports; and where each organisation possesses varying levels of influence and financial resources to advocate their priorities. This diversity of sport stakeholders should not be ignored on any level of the structured dialogue; as currently a plethora of sport organisations already has a voice in the European debate through the EU Sport Forum, the new high-level dialogue should also address different levels of sport even if it may be in a more limited context – notably without forgetting grassroots sports, which is the level engaging the majority of those European citizens taking part in sporting activities.



Therefore, ENGSO welcomes the proposal of the Belgian Presidency to give a voice to grassroots sports in the future structured dialogue. Given ENGSO's role as a European umbrella sport organisation covering the national umbrella sport organisations in 41 European countries, and given its activities in promoting grassroots sports and the work of voluntary-based sport organisations, ENGSO is the natural choice to be the representative of grassroots sports in a European high-level dialogue. ENGSO itself has organised the European-wide discussion project EU:SPORT:FUTURE actively involving more than 1000 citizens in the debate about the future EU sport policy. Furthermore, ENGSO's actions in the field of social inclusion as presented in the recent Manifesto for a Truly Inclusive Sport¹, and in promoting gender equality through programmes such as WILD (Women's international leadership development) and ENTER! strengthen its role as the most extensive organisation for European grassroots sports.

Finally, ENGSO is the right organisation to be included in the dialogue not only when it comes to keeping active the millions of Europeans who are already engaged in sporting activities, but also when it comes to activating the millions of inactive people; ENGSO has the possibility to motivate and support its members, the 41 national umbrella sports organisations, to do their utmost to secure that even more Europeans will engage and be active in European sport. I do hope that ENGSO will be taken into the discussion table as a permanent, equal partner to make sure that the views of those millions of Europeans who practice sports on a non-elite level are not forgotten.

I would also like to take this occasion to point out the possibilities of the existing informal structures as part of the structured dialogue. While the Council meetings provide the Member States the formal structure for discussing and deciding on European sports issues, the informal structures offer a great opportunity for inviting representatives of sport organisations to discuss these issues and bringing in their expertise in the topics at hand. While understanding the complexity behind deciding who should take part in such discussions, I wish that the Belgian Presidency and the presidencies that are yet to come will follow the example of some of its predecessors in inviting sport organisations to observe the remaining informal meetings of its mandate.

I wish you all the success in the effort of completing your term as the leader of the European Union in this time that is so crucial to the emerging EU Sport Policy.

Yours sincerely,

Birgitta Kervinen,
President

¹ Available at http://www.engso.eu/admin/upload/Manifesto_social_inclusion_final.pdf
www.engso.eu