



High level group on Sport Diplomacy

*Third meeting
25 February 2016
Report by the European Commission*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Chairman, Mr Pál Schmitt, opened the third meeting of the High level group on Sport Diplomacy and thanked the Members for the high quality of their written contributions. During the introduction speech, major sport events like the recent Winter Youth Olympic Games in Lillehammer and the Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro were underlined by the group and represent great diplomatic opportunities for the European Union which shall be represented in these occasions.

2. THE INITIATIVE ON SPORTS AND CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN COLOMBIA

The Presentation was given by Mr Rodrigo Rivera, Ambassador of the Republic of Colombia to the Kingdom of Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and to the European Union. Sport Diplomacy was introduced as a priority of the Colombian government's strategy and an important element of the country's foreign policy. As the country was affected by a severe internal arms conflict in the last decades, sport's role in peace building, promoting reconciliation, countering violence amongst young people was underlined at first place.

In the context of foreign policy, sport's potential for creating mutual understanding and strengthening cooperation between communities and nations was highlighted. Sport also plays an important role in educating young generations and fostering social inclusion of the less privileged youngsters. The target population of the programme was identified as 13-17 years old children from vulnerable communities with high risk of drop-out from the formal education system. Within the framework of the Colombian sport diplomacy programme, sport exchanges have been taking place from 2011 to 2015 involving over 1000 young athletes and more than 200 coaches. Hosting countries also involved EU Member States such as France, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom. Various types of sports were used from football to volleyball during the exchanges.

The impact of these activities involved increased sense of belonging, educational benefits, professional development in sports and healthy living as well as access to foreign policy for young participants. Key challenges of the programme such as lack of sport infrastructure and sport equipment and the coaches' professional capacity were also touched up by the speaker.

The presentation was much appreciated by the members. The gender equality principle leading to the involvement of girls in sport activities, the role of ambassadors and diplomats in the organization of activities abroad, the bottom-up approach of the programme and the applicability of the approach in case of Europe were raised by the members. The programme's positive role in attracting foreign direct investment in less developed and post-conflict areas of the Columbia was also highlighted.

3. EU FINANCING INSTRUMENTS IN THE FIELD OF DEVELOPMENT

The presentation was held by DG DEVCO. The EU's development programme was introduced as a substantial element of the European Union's external policies contributing to the new sustainable development goals of the United Nations. EU and its Members were described as the largest development aid donors of the world accounting for more than half of the globe's aid.

Members of the High level group got acquainted with the legal framework of the development policy and the Agenda for Change Programme (2011) together with both thematic and geographic EU financing instruments available for the present financial period (2014-2020). Recent challenges of the EU development policy were also revealed.

The members expressed particular interest in the uses of sport as a tool for reaching EU development policy goals. The United Nations have already recognized sport as a tool for development; however no specific EU document mentioned the role of sport in this regard. DG DEVCO emphasized that sport plays an important role in reaching the sustainable development goals, however it is not yet reflected in the EU development policies. The Members of the High level group suggested using the visibility of sport to support EU policies in the field of development being a low-cost and highly effective tool for communication.

4. EU FINANCING INSTRUMENTS IN THE FIELD OF NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

The presentation was given by DG NEAR related to the financial instruments in place for EU neighbourhood policy. Through the detailed introduction of the project cycle it was revealed how DG NEAR aims to improve the quality of projects in target countries. Lack of sustainability and low impact of different kind of projects were the main reasons behind the development of a result oriented monitoring system by DG NEAR.

The following discussion was concentrated on the sustainability of the projects, the responsibility of partner countries and organisations as well as the neglected role of sport in the relations with neighbourhood countries.

Sport and culture were declared as important drivers of development in neighbourhood countries. The link between sport and youth was underlined in relation to the prevention of the radicalization of young people.

5. DEBATE ON THE BASIS OF THE BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

The content of the background document was discussed by the members starting with the part in relation to development and cooperation agreements. The Members agreed that priority areas of the EU sport diplomacy should be clearly identified in the document.

The meeting continued with the discussion on the part concerning the general approach of the document. The members were reminded that the document is addressed to the Commissioner Navracsics. However, the members decided to involve and to invite partners (such as the European Parliament and the upcoming presidency) for the next meeting.

The involvement of the European model of sport was also discussed. A reference will be made on the European values.

Concerning the development of an organisational structure of sport diplomacy, the Members called for creating synergies with already existing stakeholders. The role of EU delegations was underlined and the possible involvement of sport in the responsibilities of cultural departments was raised. Sport "goodwill" ambassadors were mentioned as possible ways of promoting EU sport diplomacy in third countries. The cooperation with European Sport Federations and other sport related stakeholders was also brought up during the debate.

Moreover, it was discussed key ideas which could help the development of the organisational structure of sport diplomacy:

- The development of the upcoming EU Work Plan on Sport;
- Erasmus+ as a possible financing instrument;
- A network of Sport ambassadors;
- The work in relation to the Major Sport Events;

The question of Good Governance in sport was raised. These principles are the prerequisite for the development of EU sport diplomacy and they should be mentioned within the part concerning the values of the document.

6. CONCLUSION

The EU Sport Forum will take place in The Hague on 9-10 March. Presentations of the work and the roles of both High level groups will be given.

An additional meeting will be organized in Noordwijk on 18 May and the final handover ceremony will take place in Brussels on 29 June.