

Dear Commissioner,
Dear Director-general,
Dear friends of football,

Thanks for the invitation and our warm support for the Commission services to organise this important conference.

We're all here together to search for solutions for problems that haunt professional sport already for a very long time and that are a challenge for us all - *this is about issues that concern us all as sport fans.*

We all know the malpractices and the poignant stories. It is in the interest of all honest stakeholders that these problems are tackled on this level.

Already in 2007, when the European Parliament adopted the report on football, for which I was rapporteur, the Parliament stated that - I quote - "*the current economic reality surrounding players' agents requires that football governing bodies at all levels, in consultation with the Commission, improve the rules governing players' agents.*"

We then called on the Commission "*to support efforts to regulate players' agents, if necessary **by presenting a proposal for a directive** which would include amongst others:*

- *fit and proper test;*
- *financial transparency;*
- *standard contracts; and*
- *the introduction of an "agents' licensing system" and agents' register."*

END OF QUOTE

At the time, this was the only point in the parliamentary report, on which we believed European lawmaking might be necessary.

But, in order to avoid any confusion, let me repeat: we continue to support self-regulation in sport, and it has never been our intention or ambition to try to govern sport. Our only role in this respect is a serving one. We want to assist with regard to those aspects of the context of players' agents that clearly cannot be solved at a national level. .

In its White Paper on sport, the Commission has agreed to carry out an impact assessment and an evaluation of whether action at EU level is necessary.

The results of this study on sports agents which has been made on demand of the European Commission, show that few obstacles exist to the free provision of agents' activities across the EU - which was no surprise;

but it also highlights a number of dubious practices related to agents' activities:

- more particularly, the payment of secret commissions,
- and the exploitation of young players.

The study results will be commented on later this afternoon, but in the Parliament of course we *are particularly concerned about the findings of the study with regard to criminal activities carried out in connection with sport; the study is clear: some professional sport and more specifically players' agents activities are affected by organised crime, which naturally is sad and unacceptable;*

In that regard, let me add, that with respect to the transfers of minors, we should also reflect on a prohibition for remuneration to players agents.

In the meantime FIFA has chosen a completely new route: instead of regulating the profession of agents, the new licensing system will focus on their activities.

The introduction of the mandatory Transfer Matching System, certainly has brought about increased transparency with regard to international transfers. This effort is to be applauded, but still questions remain about unregistered money flows, possible money laundering and domestic transfers remain out of the scope of scrutiny.

Tomorrow morning, and this is by pure coincidence, in the Parliament, we will vote on a new report on sport.

On agents, the paragraph in the report of my colleague Santiago Fisas reads as follows:

"Players' agents should be a regulated professional activity, and be subject to an adequate official qualification.

We call on the Commission to draw up and implement, in cooperation with the sports federations, players' unions and agents associations, a European licensing and registration system accompanied by a code of conduct and a sanctioning mechanism.

The Parliament (also) is convinced that the fiscal residence of sports agents should be within EU territory in the interest of transparency;

and above all, we want the responsible sports federations to establish a European register of sports agents in which agents would list the names of the players that they represent".

END OF QUOTE.

The best and most efficient way to accomplish these improvements naturally is by means of self-regulation, by preference of course within the context of social dialogue.

Therefore it is our duty to call on you to take measures in order to rule out malpractices, and to clean up the blur that surrounds agents' activities currently.

It is in everybody's interest, in the interest of the *clubs and the leagues*, above all the *fans* who are entitled to this, that clubs do business with trustworthy agents; it is in the interest of the *agents themselves* that they can see their reputation protected, and *players* can be assured their rights are respected and protected by their intermediaries.

I call on you Commissioner to keep up the pressure. We are confident that you will be able to broker a deal with all stakeholders here present - who, without any doubt, agree that time has come to make considerable progress towards higher standards of integrity and - in one word - better governance. The European Parliament will be your loyal ally in achieving these goals.