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Tackling the problems facing sport at European level

More focus needed on social problems facing athletes

The European Parliament has adopted a wide ranging set of recommendations to deal with the major challenges facing sport at European level. Measures to tackle hooliganism and violent behaviour as well as match fixing and illegal betting were supported by MEPs.

Latvian MEP **Tatjana Ždanoka** is a member of the European Parliament's Transport and Tourism Committee.

Speaking in the debate in Parliament, Ms Ždanoka praised the recommendations but called for action at EU level to help sportspeople and professional athletes who face difficulties at the end of their careers. She also called for action to alleviate the financial burden on the lowest paid sportspeople, and for more support for traditional sport and games.

Tatjana Ždanoka said:

"Whilst we broadly welcome these proposals, some concerns still remain, particularly on social issues. We know, for example, that many sportsmen and women across Europe face economic difficulty at the end of their professional careers. This issue was raised specifically with me by trades unions from my own country, Latvia.

"If we are talking about the European dimension in sport then this is surely an area where the EU needs to take action. Europe has a social model which should also be promoted in the case of a specific category of employees such as professional athletes.

"I hope that we can now make progress and have a common European approach for retiring professional athletes that will alleviate the financial and social burdens many of them face. We see regularly in the news reports of highly paid sportspeople living extravagant lifestyles - but the reality for a large number of sportspeople at the end of their careers is quite different."

The proposals were closely followed in the European Parliament's culture committee by **Oriol Junqueras** of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya who just recently stood down from the European Parliament.

Oriol Junqueras commented:

"I'm pleased that the European Union is taking action to deal with many of the problems and challenges facing sport, which in many different ways is so important to many peoples lives. The European Union can and should do more to help support efforts to tackle violence and hooliganism as well as match fixing.

"I'm particularly pleased that we were able to promote measures to tackle traditional sports and games - many of which are in danger of disappearing unless action is taken. We call upon the member states to take action to properly value local traditional sports, which are important to cultural identity for many.

"We've also called for more support for the role of women in sport, and for a recognition that more needs to be done to promote the role of women in the decision making bodies of sports organisations."

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