

THE HEART OF THE GAME:**why supporters are vital
to improving governance in football**

SD Europe has produced a Position Paper in order to set out evidence of how supporter involvement and ownership can help improve European football.*

SD Europe assists organised football supporters' groups in achieving formalised structured involvement in the decision-making process at their clubs and associations; and also promotes supporter ownership of football clubs. SD Europe also advises clubs on their ownership and governance structure and works with UEFA, football associations, leagues, governments and EU institutions.



Androulla Vassiliou

European Commissioner for Education,
Culture, Multilingualism, Sport,
Media and Youth, 2012

Active citizenship and a culture of participation are essential to our daily lives in Europe. Sport is a field where this is both prominent and effective. Supporters not only invest countless hours to support and volunteer for their clubs, but also help to build a spirit within their community. As active citizens and as key stakeholders, supporters should be formally involved within the sport movement. Supporters Direct Europe shows how fans can help to develop inclusive and sustainable structures at both the grassroots and professional levels, thus giving life to the concept of active citizenship.

Developing Supporter Ownership and Involvement

Regulatory Reforms

Supporter ownership and involvement can be most effectively developed by the fostering of a more sympathetic environment for it to operate in, which recognises that it can provide a more sustainable, equitable and democratic future for football.

SD Europe recommends:

- SD Europe recommends that EU institutions, Member States and European and national football associations help revive and sustain the members' association model of ownership in Europe. The structured involvement of supporters, including board representation of fans, should be formalised.

Funding and Capacity

Supporters' groups need assistance if they are to participate fully in the governance of clubs and leagues as the vast majority are under-resourced and reliant on volunteers.

SD Europe recommends:

- That EU institutions, Member States and European/national football associations should fund efforts to expand local and national networks of organised supporters' groups, and to help improve their capacity.
- That public funds should be administered on the basis of conditionality: making them only available to organisations that fulfil specific good governance criteria.

Developing Research and Evaluation

Although both European and national governments as well as sports federations make much of the social importance of sport, there is little consistent, comprehensive evidence to support these claims.

SD Europe recommends:

- That EU institutions, member states and national associations should support research into the social value of sport in Europe, identify good practice and develop pilot projects and evaluation frameworks.

* The full version of the SD Europe Position Paper is available in English, French and German on www.supporters-direct.coop



Michel Platini

President of UEFA, 2012

I have always said that fans are a fundamental part of the identity of football clubs and we are pleased to continue supporting the work of Supporters Direct Europe in bringing good governance to clubs across Europe by encouraging initiatives to involve fans in the ownership and running of their clubs. It is also particularly pleasing that after our initial support for Supporters Direct Europe, the European institutions have picked up on it as well.

1 Improving Governance in European Football

SD Europe believes supporter involvement and community ownership can be vital building blocks in establishing good governance at club, national and European levels.

SD Europe recommends:

- EU institutions should set good governance guidelines and make future funding and support conditional on their implementation.
- Club licensing and financial fair play rules need to be extended to all leagues.
- The structured involvement of supporters should be in place at all clubs and associations.
- Receipt of a share in revenues generated by football, as well as EU and Member State public funds, should be conditional on implementation of supporter involvement criteria.

2 Improving Financial Sustainability

The European game faces historic levels of debt, clubs living beyond their means, and clubs entering insolvency, which diminishes the social value of sport.

SD Europe recommends:

- Financial Fair Play rules should regulate club finances throughout all professional leagues overseen by more inclusive and accountable decision-making structures.
- Community ownership should be encouraged through preferential financial measures.
- Football authorities should distribute collective income more equitably and use it to incentivise sustainable financial policies at clubs and good governance.

3 Improving the Social Function of Sport

Supporter involvement and ownership can play a particularly important role in delivering the social value of sport in Europe, including encouraging democracy and active citizenship, developing volunteering and improving community cohesion.

SD Europe recommends that EU institutions, member states and football governing bodies:

- Assist SD Europe in addressing barriers to ownership and involvement in order to promote democracy and active citizenship.
- Fund volunteer and community engagement by supporters' groups to promote active citizens, grassroots sport and community cohesion.

4 Improving Transfer Operations

A variety of bad practices and external threats have been identified with regard to transfer operations and Third Party Ownership (TPO).

SD Europe recommends:

- An increase in the transparency of transfer operations should be achieved - through regulation if necessary.
- TPO should be prohibited and the regulation of sports agents more actively enforced.

5 Improving the Fight against Match Fixing

Match fixing distorts competition, and places the ethics and core values of sport under threat.

SD Europe recommends:

- Supporters should play an active role in the prevention of match fixing, including disseminating information, awareness raising, and education.
- Better governance of football clubs through supporter involvement and ownership, and better coordination of stakeholders, in order to reduce the risk of match fixing.

6 Reducing Discrimination and Violence

Football supporter organisations have historically been at the forefront of campaigns against discrimination and violence and should remain so.

SD Europe recommends:

- Agencies should work more closely with fans' groups and support Football Supporters Europe (FSE), FARE network and Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE).
- Increasing supporter ownership to inculcate responsibility and foster self-regulation.
- UEFA should extend its work in tackling institutional discrimination and strengthening sanctions against racism.