

(SP) SPORT AND CYPRUS' ACCESSION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: EXPECTATIONS, FEELINGS AND KNOWLEDGE OF CYPRIOT SPORT ACTORS

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Introduction

The fact that there is no legal basis for sport in Europe, while at the same time sport is subject to indirect policies of the EU, mainly as employer and economy factor, constitutes several challenges in the area of sport in the member-states (Tokarski W. et al, 2004). For the recently integrated countries, these challenges are even bigger, since their sport structures are subject to change because of the ongoing processes of adaptation of sport in the general set-up of EU laws and market economy (Petry K. et al, 2004). The recent integration of Cyprus in the European Union was welcomed with mixed feelings and several expectations by the Cypriot public (Eurobarometer, 2004). Arguably, expectations and feelings concerning the EU accession are present also in the area of sport, since it is a part of society with people involved within it in various roles. Yet, realistic expectations and feelings are highly depending on accurate and sufficient knowledge about the European sport policy. Moreover, proper and correct knowledge of the current sport policy of the EU, as well as the sport policy of the Council of Europe will provide the people involved in Cypriot sport with a realistic picture of their personal chances in the European domain and a clearer idea of the future of Cypriot sport in the context of the European Union. In the light of the recent integration of Cyprus in the EU and the feelings and expectations which has caused, this study is intends to discover the knowledge, expectations and feelings of various sport actors, namely, athletes, Physical Education teachers and students majoring in different fields of sport.

Methods

This study is based on a survey carried out with Cypriot sport actors, specifically, Cypriot soccer players, Cypriot Physical Education teachers and Cypriot students majoring in fields relevant with sport, namely Physical Education, Sport Management and Elementary Education. The sample was selected randomly among the previously mentioned sport actors. The data was collected by the means of questionnaire which had a specific focus on the functioning of EU, the European sport policy with questions concerning the sport actors' expectation, opinion and feelings about the EU accession of Cyprus and the future of sport in Cyprus in the light of the accession. The collected data were processed and analyzed with the SPSS 10.0 program for Microsoft Windows.

Results

Lack of correct and accurate knowledge was discovered in all the groups of Cypriot sport actors, with very few exceptions of highly ranked sport officials (Alexopoulos A. 2005). Characteristics of the lack of knowledge about sport issues and policy within the European Union were the belief of European Sport Model and the belief of a common sport structure in all the twenty-five member-states of the EU. As far as it concerned the Cypriot sport actors' expectations and feelings about the future of Cypriot

sport as a member-state of the European Union, it was found that the earlier discovered lack of correct knowledge about the sport policy of the European Union and the sport policy of the Council of Europe is leading to unreasonable and unjustified expectations. Overall, it was found that Cypriot sport actors are mistakenly assuming that the country's recent accession in the European Union will solve the major problems of Cypriot sport in future time, for instance, enforce the construction of new sport facilities, help the employment of Physical Education teachers in the primary schools, increase the budget for sport and so on. Nevertheless, these desires may imply the people's need for a more active involvement of the EU in the field of sport. With regard to the actors' feelings and personal expectations, the survey discovered mixed feelings of optimism and pessimism. While the respondents were rather optimistic about the future of Cypriot sport in the context of EU, at the same time they were rather pessimistic about their personal chances as EU citizens. Concerning their personal expectations, differences were identified which were attributed to each field's present professional challenges.

Discussion

There is a number of factors working together, which can explain the lack of knowledge of the Cypriot sport actors. Firstly, the issues of the European Union and the sport policy of the European Union and the Council of Europe do not receive much attention in the mass media. In addition, at the time of integration, the attention was shifted on how the accession could solve the Cypriot problem of the Turkish occupation and therefore create a gap in the informational process as to what is the European Union and how the different social institution will be influenced. Secondly, there is an absence of an informational process focusing on issues of sport policy, on the behalf of the Cyprus Sport Organization, which is the supreme authority for sport in Cyprus. The Organization has published several books and booklets with European sport policy topics; these publications have not found their way to widely implicated people. Finally, this study discovered an admitted indifference and disinterested of the Cypriot sport actors towards issues related to the European Union. The majority of the respondents stated that they associate the European Union with politics and therefore support that EU issues are better to be left to politicians.

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