

Footballers and employers launch new EU forum for social dialogue

Organisations representing players, leagues and clubs from around the EU today sat down together for the first time, in Paris, to discuss and tackle labour issues of common concern in the professional football sector. The new social dialogue committee – launched by Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimír Špidla and Education, Training, Culture and Youth Commissioner Ján Figel' – brings together the International Federation of Professional Footballers' Associations-Division Europe (FIFPro) and the Association of European Professional Football Leagues (EPFL). The employers' side is complemented by the European Club Association (ECA). Given the specificity of sport governance, the social partners have invited UEFA to chair their dialogue.

"Footballers are some of the most mobile professionals in Europe, so this new social dialogue will help to tackle issues that simply cannot be resolved at national level," said Commissioner Špidla. "By sitting down together, employers and players will be able to improve employment relations for all players and reduce disputes through dialogue. I now encourage other social partners in the sport sector to follow this very good example."

Commissioner Figel' added that "this is the first time that the various stakeholders are getting together with the Commission to discuss labour issues. I particularly welcome this, since it implements one of the main actions outlined in the Commission's White Paper on Sport of July 2007. I believe that it reflects an increased willingness and openness for lasting, constructive dialogue in the sporting world between the sports organisations, sportspersons themselves and the European Commission. We look forward to building on this initiative."

Minimum requirements for professional players' contracts is the first issue on the discussion table. The partners – represented by Sir Dave Richards, Chairman of the EPFL and the Premier League, Philippe Piat, President of FIFPro Division Europe, and Jean-Michel Aulas, (ECA and Olympique Lyonnaise) – will discuss and try to reach agreements on minimum standards in fields like health and safety at work, health insurance, education for young players, obligations and rights of players, conflict resolution and image rights.

Within the European Union, FIFPro represents more than 28 000 players in 20 EU Member States. EPFL represents high-level leagues and clubs associations from 17 EU Member States with altogether more than 600 clubs in the EU. In particular, it speaks on behalf of those leagues and the French and Dutch club associations that negotiate collective agreements at national level, which currently exist in eleven Member States. The social partners also want to promote social dialogue and reinforce capacity in the EU Member States. ECA represents 103 top clubs, of which currently 67 are in the EU Member States.

This latest sectoral social dialogue committee is the 36th of its kind set up at EU level and gives the European social partners an opportunity to contribute to governance in employment affairs in an autonomous and participative way. The Commission encouraged social dialogue in the sport sector in its 2007 White Paper on Sport.

Further information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/socialdialogue>

<http://ec.europa.eu/sport>