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Subject: Sport and physical activity at school age
- *Policy debate*
(Public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency])

Following consultation of the Working Party on Sport, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate on the above subject at the EYCS Council meeting on 25 November 2014.

Sport and physical activity at school age

Presidency discussion paper

There is increasing research evidence that indicates a perceived decline or marginalization of sport and physical activity in school age. Although physical education is a compulsory subject in all EU Member States, there are apparent deficiencies in provision, specifically relating to curriculum time allocation and subject status, as well as financial, material and human resources.

There are worrying signals that the time allocated to physical education in schools has been reduced in some Member States, especially for primary school age groups. Furthermore, the purpose of physical education in school age should be redefined in order to move beyond sports-dominated competition and performance related activity programmes. In fact, to address the increased problem of childhood obesity, physical education in school age should better reflect the need to promote and enhance active and healthy lifestyles.

The European Commission, in its 2007 White Paper on Sport, emphasized the education and health benefits deriving from sport activities, whether in school physical education lessons or extracurricular activities. Subsequently, the EU Guidelines on 'Health Enhancing Physical Activity' estimated that up to 80 % of school-age children engage in physical activity solely at school, and that they should have at least one hour of light physical activity every day¹.

¹ EU Physical Activity Guidelines, welcomed in the Presidency Conclusions of the Informal meeting of the EU Ministers, responsible for sport, in November 2008.

Sufficient time devoted to sport and physical activity at school, either in the formal curriculum or on an extracurricular basis, can make a key contribution to healthier lifestyles. In fact, physical education has more than just a recreational dimension. Physical activity also develops, through the personal interaction and team effort present in many sports, principles and concepts such as fair play and respect, body consciousness, and social awareness. There is also evidence to suggest that physical activity in school, or before school, improves levels of concentration among pupils and leads to improved educational attainment. Benefits can therefore be felt beyond physical education and sport, in areas such as good health, sound personal development, social inclusion and educational achievement.

The Council Recommendation, adopted by EU Sport Ministers in November 2013, on promoting health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) across sectors stressed that “Physical education at school has the potential to be an effective tool to increase awareness of the importance of HEPA, and schools can be easily and effectively targeted to implement activities in this regard”.

The EU Work Plan for Sport 2014-2017, adopted in May 2014, foresees the preparation of Expert Group recommendations to encourage physical education in schools, including motor skills in early childhood, and to create valuable interactions with the sport local authorities and the private sector. An important task, in this sense, can be carried out by national and local sport bodies.

Given the importance of the matter, the Presidency wishes to have an exchange of views on sport and physical activity in school age among European Union Sports Ministers in the context of a policy debate at the EYCS Council on 25 November 2014.

During the debate, Ministers will be kindly invited to respond to the following questions:

- 1. What are the reasons for declining rates of sports participation and physical activity among school age children ?**

- 2. Taking into account the current constraints in public expenditure what can governments and public authorities do to reverse current trends and promote the practice of sport and physical activity for this age bracket ?**

The Presidency will be inviting a prominent external speaker, who will introduce the discussion and provide his insights and perspectives on this issue: Mr Giovanni MALAGÒ (President of the Italian National Olympic Committee, CONI).

In their interventions, Ministers should be guided both by the questions set above, and by the presentation of the external speaker. Ministers will be encouraged to **intervene freely** in response to the speaker, **without scripted interventions**, by asking questions or commenting. The Presidency will also invite the external speaker to respond to the debate as it unfolds, and reflect on points made by the Ministers.

In order to give all Ministers an opportunity to contribute, interventions will be restricted to **two/three minutes** maximum.
