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## **REFLECTIONS ON THE 2023 SPORT&EU ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

The 17th Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Sport and the European Union (Sport&EU) took place in Lisbon on 6-7 July 2023, excellently organised by the *Universidade Autonoma de Lisboa*. It was the first time Sport&EU's flagship event was staged in Portugal, and the second (after Madrid in 2016) in the Iberian Peninsula. The conference gathered 50 delegates, including paper givers, discussants and attendees.

As usual, the conference was an excellent opportunity to discuss the latest trends and developments around sport and Europe. Centre stage, of course, where discussions about the ongoing legal challenges that are pending before the Court of Justice of the European Union. An excellent panel and round table featuring Miguel Maduro Poiares, Ben van Rompuy, Katarina Pjetlovic and Benoit Keane discussed not only the ongoing proceedings before the court, but focused on the conflict of interest of sport governing bodies as regulators and commercial actors in today's professional sport.

But beyond the more traditional topics of Sport&EU conferences, perhaps there were two eye-opening sessions in Lisbon. The first one was devoted to technology, sport and regulatory issues. With debates not just about esports, which are perhaps better known, but about how the use of technology is changing the way sport is practiced and managed. One question out of that very pertinent session is that, in a very similar way to current debates on the use of the internet, technology and social networks, perhaps the EU and member states should pay more attention to the impact that the use of technology is having on sport, from changing practices (i.e. VAR in football) to data gathering and data protection issues.

A second area of interest that appeared in several panels is perhaps less ground-breaking, but pertinent and relevant, nonetheless. There were a few papers, and one panel specially, that reflected on the implementation of EU sport policy. Indeed, it will be soon 15 years since the Treaty of Lisbon and Article 165 entered into force. There have been several rounds of Erasmus+ projects, funding of studies and reports of expert groups in topics as varied as sports diplomacy, grassroots sport or Health Enhancing Physical Education. But there seems not to be clear, articulated and properly structured research on the impact of those measures, let alone on the implementation process. Policy implementation is not a new area for those doing research in the political sciences, but it seems not to have arrived, yet, to the Sport&EU community, as we still seem to be debating more basic issues such as the horizontal effect of Article 165 TFEU. Moreover, two interesting papers presenting research on the possible Europeanization effect of European football competitions suggested that there might be a, ever so slight, soft feeling of Europeanism through daily football contact. Thus, the message I picked up by attending those panels and papers was that there is "something" going on, and that the repeated contacts through either informal social activities or more formal policy initiatives and projects might be having some consequences. However, we really still do not

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know much about it, and whether it might be effective or not. A starting point could be to take stock of Erasmus+ projects or to investigate the implementation of the HEPA guidelines in member states. Hopefully we will see papers on those topics in future Sport&EU conferences.

Whereas the academic quality of the conference was high, perhaps some of the best in the last few years, the social element was also excellent. Sport&EU prides itself on being a welcoming academic community and this is reflected in the number of participants that keep attending each year, but also the new delegates we welcomed in Lisbon. It is specially encouraging to see the number of younger academics that attended the conference. We hope it was an enriching experience for them. Equally, it was noticeable the diversity amongst the paper givers and delegates. We achieved an excellent gender parity level, with no male-dominated panels and a noticeable presence of female academics, which is something we value dearly at Sport&EU. In this Lisbon edition there was also a noticeable racial diversity, with one panel featuring all non-white European paper givers. Whereas the conference still lacks more racial diversity, we hope to encourage Sport&EU members from under-represented racial groups to attend our events. If you are reading this conference report, rest assured you will be welcome into our conference with open arms and we will make all efforts to ensure that Sport&EU remains the diverse, equitable association that we aim to be.

Finally, a word of immense thanks has to go to the local organisers. Professor Vera Pedragosa was the head of the local organising committee and her enthusiasm for the event transpired in the preparation and delivery of the conference. The professionalism of her team will be very difficult to follow up. We also would like to thanks Rui Alexander Jesus, Sport&EU's board member and Invited Professor at the Universidade Autonoma, for his work in the preparation and delivery of the conference. Last, but by no means least, the team of student volunteers were the bedrock of the conference and were excellent throughout. Without them, the conference would not have been the same.

We look forward to seeing you at the 2024 Sport&EU conference, which will take place in Angers (France). We equally look forward to reading your conference papers if you decide to submit them to the journal.

Borja García García  
Loughborough University  
Sport&EU Executive Director