



A.Vassiliou: Sports for all - the key for the public well-being

‘In times of economic crisis, sport can help to keep people healthy, as well as getting them involved with others and learning something new. Sport can generate growth and jobs too and even help to revitalise poorer areas’, says Androulla Vassiliou, the member of the European Commission responsible for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth.

A.Vassiliou is the patron of the TAFISA 5th Sport for All Games ‘Siauliai 2012’ in Lithuania. Sport is not mentioned in the official Commissioner job title but still it is considered an important part of the portfolio. Commissioner believes that sport is essential not only for the health in general, but also has a significant economic impact.

We present an interview with the Commissioner about the upcoming Games, Sports for All, active and healthy way of life.

Your agenda is very tense, you deal with lots of questions about youth and education. What inspired you to become a patron of the TAFISA 5th World Sport for All Games 5-11 July 2012?

As Commissioner, I'm responsible for promoting sport for all as part of my portfolio, this is why I'm delighted to become a patron of the 5th TAFISA World Sport for All Games in Šiauliai, Lithuania. As patron, I'm glad to be able to support a combination of traditional sporting contests, demonstration sport events, contests for people with disabilities, championships, musical and cultural events, scientific conferences and seminars open to participants from all over the world. What's more, I am still an active sportswoman myself. I enjoy swimming, particularly in the summer, and walking. My job does not allow for too much sporting activity, but I think it's very important for us all to make some time to exercise the body as well as the mind.

What do you think is the best way to get young people to take up a sport, and to continue with it?

It is a very important point. Studies show that healthy children tend to do better academically. Sport also teaches discipline and other values. My message is that active children grow up to become active adults. This in turn has positive effects beyond the individual, for society and the economy in general.

I think parents should do more to encourage children to take up sport and, wherever possible, to do it together with them. Schools also have an important role in this respect. Sport helps youngsters to stay fit and leads to strong and healthy physical development.





‘Active people — better world’ – that's the slogan for the ‘Siauliai 2012’ Games. How does that idea apply to you yourself, and to your family? Do you think sport can help to change the world?

‘Active people — better world’ is a great slogan. It also fits very well with our 2012 European Year of Active Ageing. Sport and exercise is not just for youngsters. It is for all ages to enjoy and helps people to remain healthy and active in the later years of life. Sport and physical activity help to keep people healthy and to build links between people.

I think our societies should show more initiative in promoting active ageing. Exercise can play a major role in helping people to enjoy healthy, active and long lives. The ‘Siauliai 2012’ Games can also contribute to strengthening solidarity between generations since they are open to all age groups and to people with different levels of proficiency. There is something for nearly everyone in the programme – beach volleyball, wheelchair basketball, archery for children, dance competitions, demonstration of motorized paragliding, amateur sport fishing, gymnastics with music for all - to mention just a few. All of these events feature ways to involve different people and invite them to create similar projects in their own organisation or sports club.

Big sports events are quite controversial in Lithuania. Though many people and professional sports federations are in favour of them, when someone decides to promote a big event, there's always a hot debate about funding. What do you think about big events and investment in public sports facilities?

I'm in favour of both. Investing in public sports facilities is a good thing. There is a very close relationship between professional and amateur sports in Europe. Most sports take place in amateur settings and, in my view, public sports facilities at the grassroots level are beneficial for everyone. They also provide the springboard for professional athletes. Supporting sport at grassroots level through joint projects between organisations in different Member States is one of the aims of the EU programme I have proposed, 'Erasmus for All'.

Lithuania is having a hard time during this economic crisis, like the rest of Europe. Do you think it is right to invest in public sports facilities while people are dealing with unemployment?

In times of economic crisis, sport can help to keep people healthy, as well as getting them involved with others and learning something new. Sport can generate growth and jobs too and even help to revitalise poorer areas. According to the World Economic Forum (Davos 2009), sport generates about 2% of global GDP. I am cooperating with other countries in the European Union to develop a better understanding of the impact that sport has on the EU's economies. So yes, I think it's very important to invest in sport, even in times of austerity.





There is a growing number of obese or overweight children in Lithuania and elsewhere in the EU. Do you think sport has a role in countering this trend?

Definitely. The rising number of children who are overweight or obese is very worrying. Exercise can play a very important role in helping them to lose weight and become healthier. Sport organisations are crucial in spreading the message, and we need them to develop this role. Athletes have a positive image and attract others to take up a sport, thus promoting a healthy lifestyle.

What are your favorite sports? What sports do you watch on TV? Do you plan to come to Lithuania and take part in the Games?

My favorites are probably tennis, swimming and athletics, so I'm looking forward to an eventful summer this year! As regards Lithuania, I will certainly come if I can and my agenda allows me to. Meanwhile, I wish the TAFISA 'Siauliai 2012' Games and all who take part in them all the best.

5th TAFISA World Sport for All Games 'Siauliai 2012'
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