



Riga: 10.10.2014

Fair Play in Communication

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- Fair Play, means same chances, same opportunities for sports media
- Fair Play, means respect from the Federations or the Organizers of a sport event
- Fair Play, means no restrictions in mixed zone or fees for accreditation
- Fair Play, means equal fees for the same or similar services



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Action

- For all these reasons AIPS EUROPE decided to start a honest fight in the European Parliament.
- The first petition had a huge success two days ago.
- The Parliament accepted our arguments, ignored the position of the Commission and decided to start investigation and ask the opinion of three Commissions



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Step by step

So, on October 7, the AIPS EUROPE, the European section of AIPS (the International Sports Press Association) was defended a petition to the Committee of Petitions of the European Parliament in Brussels. The intention of the petition was to safeguard the freedom to report on sports events.

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The right of the information

In recent years, there have been several incidents, mostly but not exclusively involving radio, clearly showing that the right to inform is under threat.

A few examples



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Champions League: “Private” Law

In 2011 all French radios dropped coverage of Manchester United – Olympique Marseille, after Manchester United demanded € 26,000 from each French radio station wishing to cover the game, even though English radio stations were able to report on Olympique Marseille – Manchester Utd free of charge

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Willing cash cows?

Organizers and marketing agencies increasingly see the press as willing cash cows. At Milan-San Remo (marketed by IMG on behalf of organizer RCS), prices for facilities (such as commentary positions) doubled from one year to the next, under the false claim that “standards had improved”. They had not.

Race organizers should not forget that their events are taking place in the public domain (public streets), so how can they claim ownership and impose all sorts of access fees?



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Cycling

The UCI forces radios (broadcasting news updates only) to pay €250 to have access to the press center during the 2014 Road World Cycling Championships. In 2013, the UCI and its media rights agency "INFRONT" even tried to impose an access fee on non-rights holders to enter the mixed zone for post-race interviews.



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Belgian Football

In 2014, the Pro League (First Division in Belgian football) banned non-rights holders TV (including regional televisions) from working in the mixed zone, effectively stopping them from interviewing players after a match. They are allowed to use reactions from the official match feed only, effectively forcing them to pay for interviews over which they have no editorial control .



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Premier League in UK

For the written press on the continent, it is virtually impossible to get an accreditation for Premier League games. Why does a journalist need to sign a 13 page contract in order to receive an accreditation?

And why does an application need to be submitted with "a copy of the organization's public liability insurance cover note for a minimum amount of £ 5 million"?



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A growing disrespect

These cases show a growing disrespect for the origins of all these great events, many of which were created by the press in the first place. But first and foremost, media should be allowed to inform.

Our petition did not seek to put a stop to the principle of media rights. We didn't dispute charges for commentary facilities either, but they should be fair. But above all, we want to protect news access, access to mixed zones and the right to inform.

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Brussels 07.10.2014

- What happened there?
- Which was the opinion of the Commission?
- Which was the opinion of the members of the European Parliament?
- What finally decided the President of the Petitions Committee?



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Decision

The Committee of Petitions of the European Parliament decided to accept the petition of AIPS Europe and to refer it to three other Committees of the European Parliament:

- a. Culture and Sports (CULT),
- b. Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO)
- c. Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE).

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What exactly try to defend?

Last year some European federations or organizations, begun to create their owns media teams, trying to control the paths of the information. We fight against this situation, which is goes against:

- a. The Freedom of the Media (from the sports media side)
- b. The Right of the Information (from the public view),
- c. The Fair Play in the commercial competition (from the commerce side).



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Its time for dynamic action

Before it will be too late, it is time for the European Union to involve itself and to ask the respect of these fundamental values.

Definitely there are radio rights for commercial use, but nobody could ask fee for accreditations or to put limit to the sports media in the pre-game or post-game media conferences, or in the mixed zone.

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The reason...

Within our limits, we will not permit such actions from the clubs.

In fact we speak for companies, to choose which radio will transmit for free and which will be bound to do under payment.

This was the reason of our petition presentation and as President of our Organization – AIPS Europe, I defend our rights.



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Satisfaction

AIPS Europe is delighted that the members of the Committee of Petitions followed its arguments against practices that are threatening the independence of sports journalism.



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Strategic Plan

During the hearing in Brussels, AIPS Europe highlighted several incidents in football, rugby and cycling. Radios (but also other media) are increasingly facing charges for accreditations and access to press conferences and mixed zones for post-match/race interviews.



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Privileges

In some cases, they are even banned from stadiums or mixed zones. Furthermore, clubs and federations are trying to decide who gets access to the media tribunes, as well as who can report for free and who has to pay. These commercial practices are harmful for independent reporting.

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Did really have price all the human values?

The European Commission found that it is not competent in this matter because as they told, there is not legal guidelines for all these cases.

However, AIPS Europe was pleased to hear that European Parliament members clearly disagreed with that view. These are some remarks that were made:

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Remarks

- *“Some federations are operating outside of the law. They are abusing their dominant position.”*
- *“The European Commission should not run away from its responsibility in this matter. This is a clear breach of the principle that people should be treated equally. If the European Commission managed to harmonize the roaming tariffs across Europe, why shouldn't it act to harmonize a market where the equal right to inform is clearly being breached.”*



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Conclusion

In the weeks to come, AIPS Europe will work hard to present a solid case to CULT, IMCO and LIBE. For the right of every European citizen to have access to sport events and to real protagonist, to the athletes via the media channels.

Thanks for your attention!