

Italian union challenges 'illegal' law at EC

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The Italian players' union AIC has submitted a complaint to the European Commission against the Italian government, the national football association FIGC and the Italian Olympic Committee CONI. The AIC claims that these three are not complying with European legislation concerning youth players in professional football. The union is being supported by Michele Colucci, a lawyer specialising in EU matters.



The AIC is submitting its complaint in relation to two matters which are enshrined in Italian regulations (the *Vincolo Sportivo*), namely:

- the requirement for players to remain with the club with which they were registered as a youth

player until their 25th birthday;

the right of a club to have first refusal as regards the entering into of a contract with a youth player who was trained at that club.

According to the AIC, the rules are in conflict with EU law (the freedom of movement of citizens in general and workers in particular), the Italian constitution and the fundamental principles of Labour Law and Freedom of Association.

More than 1.4 million footballers in Italy are tied to their club by this rule until their 25th birthday, including amateur players. Until that age, they may only move elsewhere with the permission of their club. However, European regulations stipulate that a player is free to sign with a club of his choice following the end of his contract. The Italian rule represents an impermissible impediment to young professionals being able to accept another job outside of Italy.

Furthermore, the disputed regulations also violate the protection of youth sport which is now rightly being pursued by the EU.

In the complaint, the AIC states that the FIGC is continuing to adhere to its own, illegal system despite a previous ruling by the FIFA Disciplinary Committee which proved that the Italian rules in this regard are not permissible. The AIC gives alternatives, such as the German system whereby the professional football clubs have placed the costs of training young players in a solidarity fund.

FIFPro fully endorses the AIC's complaint and will lend its support where necessary. 'It is high time that the Italian government justifies its membership of the European Union and that the rules which have been jointly agreed are also complied with, especially as far as the position of young people is concerned. They belong to a vulnerable category and deserve all possible protection', says Wil van Megen, a lawyer in FIFPro's legal department.

Incidentally, the AIC (whose vice president Leonardo Grosso (pictured) is also a FIFPro board member) has not only raised the matter with the European Commission. It has also informed FIFA president Jo



seph Blatter regarding the actions of the Italian football association.

The AIC has long been battling the Vincolo Sportivo. Until a few years ago, the rule did not just apply to the 25th birthday, but for life. After lengthy negotiations, the AIC agreed at the time to lower the age to 25, with the promise from the Italian football authorities that the rule would quickly be scrapped. However, this still has not happened.