



# History of the UEMS MJC on Sports Medicine and the First Steps of the UEMS Section on Sports Medicine

*Editorial*

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Received: 18 May 2026  
Accepted: 11 June 2026  
Published: 06 November 2026

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DOI: [10.67452/EMSR.2026.019](https://doi.org/10.67452/EMSR.2026.019)

## Abstract

This editorial traces the institutional history of Sports Medicine within the Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (UEMS), from the founding vision articulated in 2005 to the formal recognition of Sports Medicine as a primary EU medical specialty in 2024 and the subsequent establishment of the autonomous UEMS Section on Sports Medicine. The account documents the foundational steps of the UEMS Multidisciplinary Joint Committee (MJC) on Sports Medicine, its engagement with the European Commission, the complex national documentation process within the Internal Market Information (IMI) system, and the educational and structural achievements accomplished over nearly two decades. The editorial also records the first General Assembly of the new UEMS Section held in Riga in May 2025, including the elected officers of its inaugural Bureau.

**Keywords:** Sports Medicine; UEMS; specialty recognition; European Commission; MJC; European Training Requirements; medical specialties.

## Introduction

The recognition of Sports Medicine as a primary medical specialty at European Union (EU) level represents the outcome of a long and complex institutional process spanning nearly two decades, from 2005 to 2024. This editorial outlines the historical and organisational pathway leading to the establishment and activities of the UEMS Multidisciplinary Joint Committee (MJC) on Sports Medicine, as well as the transition towards the creation of the autonomous UEMS Section on Sports Medicine.

## The Initial Vision (2005–2007)

The origins of this process can be traced back to the European Sports Medicine Congress held in Limassol on 13 October 2005. On that occasion, the President of the European Federation of Sports Medicine Associations (EFSMA), Prof. Norbert Bachl, presented a seminal lecture entitled “The future of Sports Medicine in the new Europe”, articulating a visionary goal: the recognition of Sports Medicine as a full medical specialty at EU level.



At that time, EFSMA had formally applied to the Union of European Medical Specialists (UEMS) for the creation of a Multidisciplinary Joint Committee in Sports Medicine, submitting the request through the UEMS Section of Pneumology, with the support of the UEMS Secretary General, Bernard Maillat. The initiative quickly gained institutional backing within the UEMS framework, particularly through the involvement of the UEMS Section of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, which provided early strategic support at both UEMS and EU levels.

### **Establishment of the UEMS MJC on Sports Medicine**

Under UEMS Rules of Procedure, the establishment of an MJC requires a governing Board composed of delegates from several UEMS Sections with recognised professional interest in the subject area. During initial UEMS Council meetings, participation from eligible Sections was limited.

The first formal step was the nomination of a delegate from the Section of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, Prof. Nicolas Christodoulou. This was followed by engagement with Cypriot colleagues from other Sections:

- Orthopaedics: Dr Andreas Tanos
- Allergology: Dr Andreas Liveris

Together with representatives from the UEMS Section of Pneumology and EFSMA, these contributions enabled the formal constitution of the first Board of the MJC. The Board elected Prof. Nicolas Christodoulou (Cyprus) as President and Prof. André Debruyne (Belgium) as Secretary and Treasurer.

From that point onward, the MJC met almost annually, organising meetings in various European cities, often in parallel with UEMS Council assemblies, EFSMA congresses, or dedicated MJC sessions.

### **First Engagement with the European Commission**

The first major strategic action of the MJC was to seek formal guidance from the European Commission on the requirements for EU-level recognition of Sports Medicine as a medical specialty. The Commission clarified that recognition required evidence that Sports Medicine was officially recognised and practised as a primary specialty in at least two-fifths of EU Member States.

An extensive data-collection process followed, involving correspondence with national Sports Medicine societies and authorities to obtain official documentation on the status of the specialty in each country. The collection, validation, and consolidation of this material required several years. Once completed, the documentation was submitted to the relevant Commission services.

The Commission subsequently indicated that the formal request had to be submitted by the Ministry of Health of a Member State where Sports Medicine was already recognised as a primary medical specialty. Thanks to decisive support from Italian colleagues, Prof. Fabio Pigozzi and Prof. Maurizio Casasco, a meeting of the UEMS MJC president was arranged in Rome with the Italian Minister of Health, who agreed to formally submit the application.

### **The IMI Procedure and National Challenges (2015–2023)**

The process then entered a technically demanding phase, following notification from the European Commission's E4 Unit that the Council of Coordinators for the Free Movement of Professionals required all Member States recognising Sports Medicine as a primary specialty to upload their official documentation into the Internal Market Information (IMI) system.



This stage proved particularly complex, as it involved governmental administrations rather than professional organisations. The timeline was further affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several challenges arose at national level:

- Ireland initially uploaded documentation with the assistance of Prof. Joe Cumminskey, but later withdrew it due to internal administrative issues.
- Lithuania was unable to upload documentation following a reduction in training duration from four to three and a half years.
- Slovenia declined participation because Sports Medicine and Occupational Medicine share a common three-year core curriculum.
- Portugal, despite meeting all criteria, experienced prolonged delays due to governmental approval procedures.

Initially, nine Member States were compliant: Italy, Poland, Romania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Bulgaria, Croatia, and the Netherlands. Progress toward the required threshold continued when Malta successfully uploaded documentation and Lithuania restored the four-year training duration. However, the unexpected withdrawal of the Netherlands created the need to identify a replacement country.

Through direct communication and UEMS-mediated dialogue with Ireland and Portugal, the critical threshold was eventually reached when Portugal uploaded its documentation.

The European Commission then launched its final evaluation of submissions from the eleven Member States that recognise Sports Medicine as a primary specialty, have dedicated national training programmes aligned with the European curriculum approved by UEMS, and have already submitted national training programmes in the IMI module of the European Commission. Accordingly, the Commission took specific follow-up actions through a Commission Delegated Act, officially published on 31 May 2024.

Sports Medicine was consequently recognised as a full medical specialty and has been added to the 7th draft delegated act amending Annex V to Directive 2005/36/EC.

### Recognition and Institutional Acknowledgment

On the eve of the UEMS Council meeting in autumn 2024, a special meeting of the MJC was convened, bringing together members of the MJC Board, national delegates, and members of the UEMS Enlarged Executive Committee.

This meeting marked a historic milestone for European Sports Medicine, fulfilling a vision first formulated nearly twenty years earlier. Among the participants were Prof. Norbert Bachl (past President of EFSMA), Prof. Fabio Pigozzi (President of FIMS), Prof. Maurizio Casasco (President of EFSMA), Prof. Nicolas Christodoulou (President of the MJC), and Prof. André Debruyne (Secretary and Treasurer of the MJC).

### Educational and Structural Achievements of the MJC

Beyond its role in specialty recognition, the MJC was highly active in education and training governance. Under UEMS Rules of Procedure, the MJC functionally operated as a Section under Executive Committee supervision. National delegates acted as educational coordinators, and the following frameworks were implemented:



- Certification by equivalence and by examination
- Certification of trainers
- Accreditation of training centres
- Accreditation of scientific events in collaboration with UEMS EACCME
- Development of the European Training Requirements (ETR) for Sports Medicine

The ETR document received unanimous approval (with one abstention from the United Kingdom) by the UEMS Council in London in October 2019, following endorsement by all UEMS Sections and national medical associations.

### Creation of the UEMS Section on Sports Medicine

Following EU specialty recognition in June 2024, efforts focused on transforming the MJC into an autonomous UEMS Section. In accordance with UEMS statutes, a formal request had to be submitted by a national medical association.

The Cyprus Medical Association submitted the required letter in August 2024, alongside the formal MJC application. The UEMS Executive Committee approved the request, and in October 2024 it was presented by the MJC president Prof. Nicolas Christodoulou to both the Advisory Board of Sections and the UEMS Council, where it was approved by an overwhelming majority. The UEMS Section on Sports Medicine was therefore formally established.

### First General Assembly of the New Section

The first General Assembly of the UEMS Section on Sports Medicine was hosted in Riga on 16–17 May 2025 during an international Sports Medicine congress, following an invitation by Dr Sandra Rozenstoka (Latvia).

The UEMS President, Prof. Vassilios Papalois, delivered an inspirational message online. The Assembly was conducted in full compliance with UEMS Rules of Procedure under the guidance of the MJC president Prof. Nicolas Christodoulou and the supervision of Dr Marc Hermanns, UEMS liaison officer. All MJC activities and funds (€8,610.94) were formally transferred to the new Section.

The following officers were elected to the inaugural Bureau:

- President: Anca Ionescu (Romania)
- Secretary General: Sandra Rozenstoka (Latvia)
- Treasurer: Kirill Mikalleg Starface (Malta)
- Board Chairperson: Tomas Brandon (The Netherlands)
- Board Secretary: Carlo Tranquilli (Italy)
- Clinical Affairs Committee Chair: Attilio Parisi (Italy)
- Clinical Affairs Secretary: Sergei Iliukov (Finland)
- Professional Practice Chair: Petra Zupet (Slovenia)
- Professional Practice Secretary: Renata Zumbakyte-Sermuksniene (Lithuania)

Membership fees were set at €1 per active specialist, with a maximum annual contribution of €2,000 per national society.

### Conclusions



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The establishment of the UEMS Section on Sports Medicine marks the successful completion of a prolonged and coordinated institutional effort, leading to full European recognition of Sports Medicine as a primary medical specialty. This process demonstrates the effectiveness of sustained multidisciplinary collaboration, institutional perseverance, and constructive dialogue between professional bodies and European authorities. The experience of the MJC may serve as a useful example of specialty development within the UEMS framework and contribute significantly to the advancement of medical professionalism and public health across Europe.