

**13th Council of Europe
Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport
(18 September 2014, Magglingen)**

**“Corruption in the governance of sport”
“Pan-European Sports Co-operation”**

**Opening speech by
Azad RAHIMOV**

**Minister of Youth and Sport of Azerbaijan,
on behalf of the Chairmanship of the
Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**

Dear Mr. Federal Consular,
Madam President of PACE,
Mr. Secretary General, dear Excellencies, colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in this beautiful city of Magglingen today for the 13th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport. I cordially greet each of you and wish you all the best of success in your endeavours.

I am pleased to extend our sincere gratitude to our hosts for their warm welcome and the excellent organization of this event.

I am confident that this conference will render its valuable contribution to the issues to be debated today and to further enhancement of the international sports cooperation.

Later today signing ceremony of the Council of Europe Convention on the manipulation of sports competitions will take place in the margins of this Conference. We feel privileged that the adoption and signature of the Convention on Manipulation of Sports Competitions coincides with current 6 month Azerbaijani chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. It is worth recalling that the process of negotiations over the draft of this convention was launched in accordance with the Resolution adopted at the 18th Council of Europe Informal Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport held in Baku on 22 September 2010. It was at this ministerial gathering in Baku that the issue of match-fixing was first put on the political agenda and we are delighted to see the concrete result of this work. Given the important role that the Council of Europe can play in this field, Azerbaijan has decided to support the adoption and subsequent opening of this legal instrument for signature during its chairmanship. The determination of Azerbaijan to make the first ever European Games in Baku in 2015 a success story is another reason to promote the adoption of this Convention during our chairmanship. However, the signing of this Convention is a starting point and we will continue to encourage ratifications - including from non-European States, in view of the interest shown by a number of them during the drafting process of the convention.

The fight against corruption in general and more specifically against match-fixing is one of the main priorities for my country. During its Chairmanship, Azerbaijan is determined to contribute to the mission of the Council of Europe, inter alia in combating corruption in the governance of sport proceeding from its positive record and comparative advantages in these areas,

particularly in the areas of promotion of sports movement and integrity of sports at national international level.

We think that one of the main issues which enforce good governance is lack of transparency and accountability. Regular reports of the spending of financial support given by the government are essential and should not be undertaken as interfere to the internal work of sport organizations.

In this context I would like to give information on that from my country. Development of sport has become one of the main priorities of Azerbaijan. New sport facilities and new buildings are being built in our country nowadays. Azerbaijan hosts a number of World's main sport events annually and we are planning to host the first European Games in 2015, World Chess Olympiad in 2016 and Islamic Solidarity Games in 2017 and now we are bidding for football European 2020. All these events demand to give regular and clearer information to society. As it is necessary to inform the taxpayers of the government where their money is spent. The people of Azerbaijan will also benefit directly from the sport facilities in the long term after the events. New sports venues will give the people new, larger-scale opportunities to support their city in becoming a major sporting center. Improved facilities and increased number of sport events will be a major legacy in attracting young people to pursue a healthy lifestyle. The number of sports in the country will increase, as will the number of people for whom sport becomes an important part of their daily life. The Athletes Village will provide living space for many young families.

So, corruption in sport damages not only the image of sport, its organizations and leaders, but also undermines the positive influence that sport has in spreading benefits to society. Corruption in the governance of sport and Pan-European sports co-operation are therefore topical issues for the Council of Europe. Council of Europe, thanks to its long standing expertise and solid legal framework can provide valuable assistance in this field. As you are aware, the sports movement in Europe is organized at continental level. Therefore, it makes sense to operate a network for co-operation on sport policy between the authorities in charge of sport on the same geographical scale. The Council of Europe is the most relevant arena in this context.

From an institutional point of view, I would like to underline that sport is a positive example of a sector which was successfully established as a Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe, allowing continued intergovernmental cooperation. I take this opportunity to invite those countries which have not yet joined the EPAS to consider taking the necessary steps to do so.

Pan-European sports co-operation plays an essential role. Many issues need a concerned approach by the governments and the sports movement. The respective responsibilities of States and sports movement need to be identified through constructive negotiation and agreements. I am pleased to note that we are on the right track, moving to a culture of dialogue, shared responsibilities and co-ordination.

We share a common culture of sport: sport for all, an autonomous sports movement, promoting sport from a healthy, educational and inclusive perspective, defending high ethical standards, etc. This is our approach to sport – as reflected in the European Sports Charter and Code of Sports Ethics – which we should continue to nurture.

Let me express my firm conviction that our today's Conference will become another tangible contribution to the international cooperation and we will continue our efforts to enhance this cooperation.

In conclusion, I would like to extend our appreciation to everyone who has invested tireless efforts in organizing this event for their unrelenting pursuit of our most noble and ambitious goal – building peace in sports.

At the same time I have the honor to invite you all to participate at the inaugural European Games in the June 2015 and be part of this historical moment!

I wish success to all of us in this critical and extremely useful work.