

Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS)

International Women's Day Breakfast Roundtable on Sport officiating and gender equality

8 March 2024, Strasbourg

Opening words by EU Ambassador to the Council of Europe, Vesna Batistić Kos

- I am very glad to be here today, at this Breakfast Roundtable of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, to discuss **about gender equality in sport and EU-CoE cooperation in this field.**
- The EU and the Council of Europe share common goals for sport in Europe, a social good and an important vehicle for the promotion of human rights and European values.
- Our strategies are both geared to promoting fair play, integrity, social inclusion and equality in and through sport. The EU Work Plan for Sport and the Council of Europe's work implanting the Sport Charter are important, complementary and provide a solid basis for cooperation.
- Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the EU and is at the core of the EU policy, as no woman or girl should be left behind. It is important to remember that women are less likely than men to be active. Only 36% of women in comparison to 44% of men regularly take part in sport.
- In 2020, the European Commission adopted its **Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**, striving for a Union of Equality, which presents policy objectives and actions to make significant progress towards a gender equal Europe.
- Moreover, the **EU Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024)** includes gender equality as a key topic. In this context, the Commission has led the works of the **High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport** that issued recommendations in spring last year addressing the topics of participation, coaching, leadership, social and economic aspects, media coverage and gender-based violence.
- The EU demonstrates its commitment within its competences in the field of sport **via its gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes such as Erasmus+.** This is also done through other means. For example, by promoting and supporting research to create evidence base knowledge, like the Eurobarometer surveys and funding projects. But also, by enabling outreach to girls and women through initiatives such as the European Week of Sports, and by conveying a dialogue with all stakeholders and promoting good practices.
- According to the Eurobarometer on sport and physical activity, men are more likely than women to become coaches. The 2015 EIGE report on gender equality in sport concluded that only 20-30% of sports coaches in Europe are women. Women are thus clearly underrepresented in coaching and officiating positions, especially at elite level. In addition, women coaches and officials are mainly concentrated in sports with high levels of women's participation such as dance or gymnastics.

- Such gender gap is caused by issues including organisational, sociocultural, interpersonal and personal barriers such as lack of opportunity for women to coach, the perception of coaching as male-dominated and gender stereotypes.
- In this regard, **the report of the High level group on gender equality recommends** to provide education on and support development of coaching and officiating opportunities for women from grassroots to elite level; to develop mentoring initiatives and to invest in campaigns to attract and maintain girls and women's interest in coaching.
- Moreover, **an intersectional approach to equality is also very essential** and should be included in gender equality policies to take into account race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other elements. It examines how interlocking systems of power impacts experiences and produce inequalities.
- Adopting an intersectional approach will help us to understand why sport participation rates among multi-marginalised groups are still very low compared to those among dominantly situated groups.
- In addition, **data collection is an integral part of policy monitoring and evaluation**. We should regularly collect and analyse data to monitor the progress and adjust actions. **Unfortunately, there is a chronic lack of data (or recent data) in several gender equality in sport related dimensions**. One of them is coaching and officiating, especially at European level. We should implement tools and processes for data collection and research to increase knowledge about the barriers the women coaches are experiencing, as well as other elements that would help to increase the number of women coaches.
- This is also why the joint project between the EU and CoE on gender equality in sport, **"All in Plus"** is of great importance for the field. We are very satisfied with our cooperation through this project which aims to ensure that the persistent invisibility of women in sport and the ongoing lack of awareness about gender imbalance in sport are brought clearly to the forefront and tackled to bring change.
- Specifically, the project addresses the data gap and focuses on further data collection and analysis, building upon earlier cooperation projects in this field. And I am very happy to see that it also works with and through the media **to increase the coverage and representation of women in sport and ensure greater awareness-raising about gender inequalities**.
- Moreover, our cooperation is also satisfactory with the ongoing project on **Combating Hate speech in Sport** that will come to its conclusive stage by the end of this year, and which aims to explore innovative approaches to address hate speech in sport.
- The project fills an important need for a European platform offering the possibility of tailoring the national approach to ensure safe and empowering sport environments. Sport stakeholders can choose their own tools and adapt their national **No Hate Speech campaign**, thus making this project extremely flexible and attractive to each country. The data and concrete examples serve as useful toolbox, and provide guidance to developing national tailored approaches. *The No*

Hate Speech campaign is an important, timely and important initiative, which I hope resonates loudly across Europe, in stadiums and online fora.

- Regarding other EU initiatives, the EU continues to support efforts by allocating EU funds by the Erasmus+ programme to projects in fields such as **gender equality, integrity, values, inclusion and the fight against exclusion**.
- As we will see from the upcoming interventions during the meeting, Erasmus+ **WINS project addresses gender equity in sport** officiating through comprehensive research into the issues affecting female sport officials and producing products to support organisations who are responsible for the recruitment and retention of female officials.
- In addition, every year, the European Commission organises the **#BeActive campaign**, together with the **European Week of Sport** at the end September. Last year, our National Coordinating Bodies and Partners organised more than 37 thousand events in 40 countries and regions, accumulating more than 11 million participants. At the end of the campaign, the Commission rewarded projects and people that illustrate the #BeActive message, with awards for those that promote sport in schools, at work, in their community and across all generations.
- In the first half of the year, the Commission also organises the **EU Sport Forum**, with a wide range of fruitful debates on relevant topics, such as equality, integrity, inclusion, regional development or sustainability. Last year edition handed out awards for projects that showcased gender equality, the “BeEqual” award and “Sport for Peace” that emphasised the power of sport for positive values and solidarity with those that are suffering from war. This year the EU Sport Forum will take place on 16-17 April in Liège, in Belgium.
- When it comes to specific instruments **to promote values and integrity in sport**, our cooperation in Europe is important and meaningful. The essence of sport is to play by a set of agreed rules, to respect the opponents, to ban violence and cheating. For sport to remain safe, fair and inclusive, all people and organisations involved in it need to have high standards of integrity.
- Against this backdrop, the Commission stands ready to continue cooperating and support **the fight against doping with the Council of Europe and European states**. The Erasmus+ programme has funded around 30 projects related to doping, with a total budget of almost EUR 20 million in the past 10 years. Moreover, the Commission supports a project worth EUR 1.43 million, led by WADA, to enhance the capacity of National Anti-doping Agencies in investigating incidences of doping use.
- In the same vein, the Commission supports efforts to fight match-fixing and corruption in sport. This battle is a global one and it is fundamental to adopt the correct legislation and develop synergies at European and international level as well as disseminating best practices. The Commission consider **the Macolin Convention (Convention on the Manipulation of Sport Competitions) a solid basis for strengthening pan-European coordination and cooperation in the fight against match-fixing**.
- I look forward to exchange and hear your views on the topic, as well as to discuss how we can further expand our cooperation in the field of sport, and specifically on gender equality.