

## **Council of Europe**

### **Closing session of 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport**

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Thank you very much for taking part and for contributing to the smooth running of the Conference throughout the months that Greece held the Presidency.

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing pandemic in all member states of the Council, it was not possible to hold this event in the usual format in Athens.

In the end, it was decided to split the Conference into a number of short online sessions.

Once again, I would like to say how sorry I am that I was unable to host the Conference here in Athens, Greece, birthplace of the Olympic Games, Olympism and the Olympic ideal.

I hope everyone is in good health, and ready to fight the pandemic and that we will soon be able to return to our normal lives.

*Ladies and gentlemen,* I am very pleased that, in the course of the Greek Presidency, we managed to discuss and produce resolutions on two key issues:

- 1) the revision of the European Sports Charter
- 2) human rights in sport

We started our discussions with the opening session on 5 November, and an introduction to Theme 1: the revision of the European Sports Charter.

The introductory session on Theme 2 took place on 7 December: human rights in sport.

After this session, a third meeting was held, namely the “Ministerial Round Table” on 15 January, in which many of my counterparts took part and at which the texts of the two Resolutions were finalised. This meeting in fact provided an opportunity to add the finishing touches.

The discussions on the Conference topics were supported and introduced by two key documents which are, of course, the two resolutions we adopted unanimously a while ago.

The adopted resolutions will be forwarded to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and will provide policy guidance for us to take the next steps in the areas concerned.

*Ladies and gentlemen*, the resolutions we adopted today are the culmination of months of hard work and constructive co-operation with all the Delegations. I wish to take this opportunity to thank you all, and the officials from your Ministries, for your active and fruitful participation throughout this period.

With regard to the first resolution, it is stated that Ministers welcome progress on the revision of the European Sports Charter and stress that the revised text should:

- recognise the common features of a European sports framework and its organisation based on values such as ethics, fair play, respect, solidarity, integrity, volunteerism, regard for human rights, innovation and sustainability;
- stress that the public authorities, the sports movement, as well as the corporate and professional sectors must comply with applicable good governance principles;
- recognise the economic dimension of sport and the role that corporate and professional sectors play in sport;
- acknowledge that the development of sports policies should promote the development of networks between all relevant public authorities, such as authorities in charge of sport, education, health, social services, town and country planning, innovation, digitalisation, culture and other leisure services, transport, justice, law enforcement, environment and development aid, as well as the local and regional authorities;
- facilitate access to sports for all layers of society, inter alia through investing in infrastructures for the practice of physical activity at the grassroots level, both inside and outside school settings.

In addition, Ministers shall:

- encourage member states to develop national sports strategies, based on the European Sports Charter, and in co-operation with the sport movement and other relevant stakeholders;

- encourage member states to exchange best practices and experiences resulting from the implementation of national sports strategies reflecting the provisions of the European Sports Charter.

Regarding the second resolution it is indicated that Ministers should encourage the member states to harness the potential of the Council of Europe, in order to further enhance the protection and promotion of human rights in the field of sport, in particular by:

- promoting the implementation of the standards contained in various conventions by all sports stakeholders;
- encouraging the use of monitoring mechanisms to highlight human rights issues and violations and to guide action in the field of sport;
- promoting the T-DO recommendation on the principles of fair trial in anti-doping disciplinary proceedings;
- developing dialogue and co-operation with international organisations in charge of the protection of fundamental rights to ensure they pay attention to sport activities;
- continuing developing partnerships with non-State actors to embed human rights considerations in their policies and operations;
- continuing and fostering the co-operation with the European Union as a driver towards common objectives and values;
- continuing developing standards and tools on the protection of whistle-blowers, paying attention that they can be effectively applied in the field of sport;
- recognising the role of sport in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change, particularly as concerns the disproportionate negative impact of climate change on the human rights of vulnerable groups.

In addition, Ministers are called upon to:

- promote sport and its many social and individual benefits to strengthen society's resilience to global crises;
- make the protection of human rights a pillar of the revised European Sports Charter.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the month that has passed since our last session, there have been a number of major developments in Greece, which are related to the themes of our Conference, as far as human rights are concerned. Firstly, in connection with the Start to Talk project, in which we are partners, an event took place on 14 January. One of the guest speakers at the

event, the Olympic sailing champion Sophia Bekatorou, broke her silence and publicly revealed that she had suffered sexual abuse at the hands of an official from her Federation.

The revelations sent shock waves throughout not only the sporting community but Greek society at large. The majority of Board members resigned in the wake of the accusations, and we are already working closely with the International Sailing Federation to repair the damage done to the reputation of a sport that has given us countless moments of national pride. The most important thing, however, is that Ms Bekatorou's commendable action has provided the impetus not only for other athletes but also for people in the arts and in the workplace to speak out, pushing the issue to the top of our national agenda. As you can see, therefore, human rights in sport is an area that offers opportunities for honest and intense dialogue and bold initiatives to improve the protection of these rights.

We have already worked hard to raise awareness in our community, to actively support our athletes, to make them feel that they are not alone and to create a safe environment in which anyone can feel safe talking openly. We have developed the initiative "Fellow Players in Reform", where we hold marathon discussions based on Greek sports. So far, we have held five teleconferences with representatives of amateur sports clubs from every corner of the country and these efforts are continuing.

Among those whom I have invited to take part in this dialogue are over 5,000 representatives from the amateur sports clubs listed in the "Amateur Sports Club Register" of the General Secretariat of Sports, more than 800 athletes, Olympians, world champions, Paralympians and distinguished athletes, representatives of sports organisations, the Greek Olympians Association, the Association of Greek Paralympians, the Association of Greek Extremely Distinguished Athletes, members and organisations (Hellenic Olympic Committee, Hellenic Paralympic Committee, Hellenic Anti-Doping Organisation, International Olympic Truce Center, athletes' associations, local authorities) involved in the Sports Ministry's groundbreaking initiative "Live sportily", heads of the National Sports Centres from all over Greece, the Employees' Associations in the General Secretariat of Sports and sports facilities.

The turnout has been unprecedented, exceeding all our expectations. More than 4,000 members of our sports community have participated in the 5 meetings. More than 1,000 people have asked to take the floor and speak out. In the five teleconferences, so far, more than 400 officials have spoken. In addition, we have already received more than 1,800 memos with helpful

suggestions and interesting ideas, which we are already working on and studying carefully, and more than 1,000 messages have been sent via the chat service.

In the coming days, we will announce what we are planning to both in the immediate future and in the medium and long term to protect individual rights and tackle the problems of lack of transparency, abuse and harassment.

In addition to sports reform, we are developing a Campaign entitled "Sports at the forefront" for the protection of individual rights in sport.

The campaign we are organising covers the whole spectrum of sports issues related to individual rights, freedoms and respect for the individual. It will also cover good governance with the focus on transparency and accountability.

The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness, inspire, inform, protect and educate citizens and, in particular, the younger generation about abuse, violence in sport, racism, discrimination and misuse.

*Ladies and gentlemen, it is time to put an end to certain attitudes and practices which in the past we have tolerated, even if only tacitly, either individually or collectively. Human dignity and human rights are not negotiable.*

As our Conference draws to a close, I will leave you with these thoughts and the hope that, in adopting these resolutions, we are equipping ourselves with two state-of-the-art, innovative texts, which capture the essence of the sporting ideal and will inspire member states to develop imaginative policies in sport. I would especially like to extend my deepest gratitude to:

- the EPAS Governing Board, its Bureau and the EPAS Consultative Committee for their hard work in preparing the two themes of this Conference,
- the speakers, moderators and panels who helped to make the sessions interesting and constructive,
- everyone who participated or watched online. From government authorities and intergovernmental organisations to ordinary citizens,
- the Council of Europe Secretariat and its staff working in the field of sport, in particular the EPAS Secretariat, and its technical assistance, interpretation and event management teams.

Thank you very much for your support.

There will now be a press conference, which will start in 5 minutes, so we invite you to stay connected to the internet.