

CoE Ministerial meeting – Closing session

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Dear Distinguished Ministers,

Dear Deputy Secretary General of Council of Europe,

Dear representatives of the member states and sport movement,

Dear colleagues,

- It is my great pleasure to attend this meeting and address you all today, although remotely.
- We have today on the agenda two very important resolutions: 1) A European approach to Sport policies: the revision of the European Sports Charter, and 2) Resolution on human rights in sport. Both are significant documents for the Sport in Europe, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the parties involved in the drafting process.
- Regarding the Resolution on the revision of the European Sports Charter, our main message throughout the whole process has been the same: to include a clear reference to the European Sport Model. Why is this so important that we continue to repeat the same message year after year? Let me be clear. Sport in Europe is at a crossroads. The Covid-19 pandemic has once again clearly shown the contribution that sport makes to our society in social, health and economic terms. The basis for this contribution are the clubs and the millions of volunteers who make sport the largest social group in Europe. The interplay between grassroots and competitive sport is an essential element that distinguishes us from an exclusively commercialised sports model.
- **And why are we then so concerned? Let me reply. [pause] It is because some of the key elements of the European Sport Model are at stake.**
- **The openness of competition based on promotion and relegation of teams according to their sporting merits is at stake. The release of best players to play for their national team is at stake. The safety and integrity of sport is at stake. And last but definitely not least, the solidarity between top and grassroots level is at stake.**
- Let me briefly explain all these key elements of the European Sport Model.
- Firstly: the openness of competition. In Europe, we have always had a priority on the sporting merits over the commercial interests. Our model is based on the principle of promotion and relegation according to the sport merits. This allows the true essence of sport to happen; better teams get promoted whereas weaker ones relegate. This also allows the great stories to happen, where even smaller clubs from national level can be crowned as European champions. Most importantly, this allows the level of the national leagues to stay attractive. The creation of closed leagues, based only on the economic power of clubs, endangers this system completely. Closed competitions do not reflect the values that we are standing for!
- Secondly, the release of players for the national teams. I am most certain that it is in the common interest of all of us, and especially for you, the representatives of governments, that our national teams can always play with their best players. Currently, e.g. in the case of basketball, this is not always the case, since there are examples where a League does not allow players to play for the national teams even in the qualifications matches for the Olympic Games or the World

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Championships. Again, this undermines the true essence of sport and it has seriously affected the strength of the national teams in some countries. To avoid this, we need to guarantee that the sport governing bodies can also in the future decide on the competition calendar and that these decisions will be respected by all parties by releasing the players to play for their country.

- Thirdly, the safety and integrity of sport. The sport governing bodies have safety and integrity measures in place for the sport events that they authorise, e.g. regarding doping controls, fight against competition manipulation, or safety of athletes. These cannot be guaranteed when third party organisers get involved in the organisation of events. The integrity and safety of sport events cannot be on sale! On the contrary, we need to continue to work altogether to fight these threats for the best of sport.
- Last but definitely not least, the solidarity between top level and grassroots sport. The solidarity mechanisms between top and grassroots level allow that the revenues made in the top level sports are regenerated back to the grassroots sports as investments e.g. in children's and youth sport, in sports clubs and in the education of referees and officials – basically in the whole development of sport and its strong grounding – grassroots sport. The revenues from the top level sport events are the essence for sport movement to ensure the development of the respective sports. This values- and solidarity-based system cannot be jeopardized by the interests of private organisers, who are only interested in making money, but not to invest back to the development of sport.
- All these are the key elements of the European Sport Model, based on common European values and solidarity. For these reasons, we keep on reiterating and repeating our message on the need to preserve the European Sport Model. A strong European Sport Model, supported by robust solidarity funding mechanisms and managed by well-governed federations, is also a key to enable you, public authorities, to deliver your policy objectives for sport in Europe.
- Let me finish by saying that Council of Europe is an important platform for the European Olympic Committees and we look forward to continue the cooperation between the Council of Europe, its member states and the sport movement in a sustainable and successful way.

I thank you for your kind consideration and attention.