

17th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport

Antalya, Türkiye, 26 October 2022

Welcoming address by Ms Linda Hofstad HELLELAND, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear **Mr KASAPOĞLU** [*Minister of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Türkiye*],

Dear **Ms PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ** [*Secretary General of the Council of Europe*]

Dear Ministers and distinguished guests,

It is a great privilege for me to address this Conference on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly. The numerous texts we have adopted on sports governance, sports ethics and equality, and the value of sports in our societies witness our longstanding recognition of the fundamental importance of sports, not only for our personal development and well-being, but also as a key tool for promoting, and strengthening adherence to, our common values – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – and to build more cohesive societies. Values to which all the Council of Europe member States have obliged themselves, by ratifying the organisation's Statute.

Another signal of our firm conviction in this respect is the participation at this Conference of representatives of different committees that have been working on sports issues. Also on their behalf, I wish to warmly thank our hosts for their hospitality in this beautiful setting of the Antalya region.

My contribution will mainly focus on the first theme which you have retained for this conference: **SPORT FOR ALL: UNITING US FOR STRONGER SOCIETIES**.

With regards to this theme, I would like to start saying that by allowing broad participation, regardless of gender, social and economic status, sport can contribute to social cohesion and integration in society, and to shifting gender norms. It can therefore have a universal dimension which goes far beyond the quest for performance.

We must combat all forms of discrimination and violence. Resolution 2465 (2022) "***The fight for a level playing field – ending discrimination against women in the world of sport***" which we adopted just a few days ago, on 13 October 2022, calls for concrete action to prevent and combat violence, sexism

and discrimination against women in sport, as well as to put an end to the blatant inequalities in pay, access, treatment and status. Certainly, we are moving in the right direction, but we are moving too slowly; we need to act with stronger determination

Numerous acts of violence and abuse have been reported as part of the “Me Too” movement in sport, and this is likely to be only the tip of the iceberg. There can be no impunity or silence and we do expect the unreserved collaboration of sports organisations in the implementation of preventive measures and the pursuit of perpetrators. Investigations must be prompt and those responsible must be identified, prosecuted and punished.

There is a pressing need to stop violence and discrimination against women, including LGBTI women, in sport, promote gender equality, invest in sport for all, encourage women’s and girls’ participation and put an end to their invisibility in this field.

Council of Europe member states should not disregard that women from diverse backgrounds, LGBTI women, women with disabilities, those from a migration background or with diverse religious affiliations are subjected to multiple discrimination. The fight against discrimination in sport must be a priority for federations; they must introduce more inclusive policies, abolishing discriminatory policies against LGBTI athletes, for instance, and must respect the human rights of female athletes in all their diversity. Full and equal access to the practice of sport must be guaranteed to all women. This also means that transgender and intersex athletes should be allowed to train and compete in sports competitions consistent with their gender identity.

More efforts are needed to prevent and combat gender-stereotypes in sport, starting with gender equality education at all levels. Sexist remarks, attacks on sexual orientation, gender identity and physical appearance should no longer be tolerated, and intersectionality should be taken into account in the development of gender equality policies in sport.

My second thought is on the interconnection between sport for all and inclusion. Sport has proved to be a powerful tool for integrating refugee and migrant athletes, including wounded refugees physically disabled as a consequence of armed conflicts in their countries. The refugee Olympic teams established by the UNHCR are a successful benchmark. FIFA and UEFA have run campaigns to promote tolerance and inclusion, and other sports associations have joined these efforts. In addition, we see in many countries that refugees and migrants

can integrate into host community life through sport clubs and activities at local level.

Ms Nigar ARPADARAI, our rapporteur on the social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons through sport, is present here today and will participate in the EPAS event tomorrow on this subject.

Partnerships between sports clubs, municipalities and private sponsors are key to overcoming barriers of language, culture, poverty and physical disability. This Ministerial Conference, the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, and the Council of Europe as a whole can dwell on good examples set over the last years and work towards the development of European cooperation and guidance in this field, where sport can function as a strong fabric of cohesion for our societies.

We parliamentarians would be glad to be partners in this effort of creating synergies among all stakeholders, in order to help refugee and migrant athletes to overcome the disadvantages and vulnerabilities linked to their status.

The ongoing war by the Russian Federation against Ukraine has displaced several millions, mostly women and children who are particularly vulnerable. Sport can be a means for them to resist and not to surrender to the horrors of the war; it can help heal their psychological trauma, strengthen their resilience against the pain provoked by all that they have lost, build hope and thus change their whole future life.

Therefore, I appeal to ministers to include a strong message in their final declaration and resolution regarding the social inclusion of migrants, refugees and displaced persons through sport.

Last but not least, sport for all must mean safe sport for all our children.

Our Assembly is actively engaged in promoting stronger protection for children in sports. We have been supporting the “Start to Talk” Campaign through many reports, and a broad range of parliamentary activities. Back in 2018, our Sub-Committee on Children and Sub-Committee on Education, Youth and Sport, held a joint meeting in Tbilisi, and proposed an action plan of key steps to better protect children against sexual violence in sport.

We do know that this is also a priority for your Ministerial Conference. Your previous Conference, in its Resolution No. 2 “Human rights in sport”, already invited EPAS to engage with Council of Europe member States and the sports movement to promote children’s rights and implement child safeguarding policies; it invited Council of Europe member States to integrate the protection of human rights into the design of sport policies and to use the Council of Europe standards and tools to enhance the protection of children’s rights in sport.

Now it is time to act! This is why our **Recommendation 2221 (2022) “Football governance: business and values”** calls for strong support for the project initiated by FIFA to establish an independent, multisport, multi-agency international entity to investigate cases of abuse in sport, providing trusted, reliable and accessible reporting lines for victims of abuse in sport, and to take prompt action to protect and care for them. My plea is that you can personally engage to back this project.

We will launch a short video on sexual violence against children in the context of sport on the occasion of 18 November - European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. It will be available in English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian. I hope that its very powerful message will have a strong impact.

We are now working on a report on “**Child protection in competitive sports**”. It will consider more widely the different risks for children’s physical, mental, and psychological well-being, including those related to exposure to exploitation and abuse, to drug-taking and doping, to various impacts on physical health, as well as bullying, invasive media coverage, physical, psychological and sexual violence, and simply to not being given enough time to learn or to play.

Also based on our resolution and recommendation on child participation, we will be actively seeking children’s views on what measures need to be put in place to ensure that sport is a safe environment where they can develop and thrive.

Before concluding my intervention, I would like to say a few words about the second theme of this conference: **RETHINKING SPORT: LEADING THE WAY FOR A HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.**

As our Assembly stated in its **Resolution 2421 (2022) “Sports policies in times of crisis”**, the Covid-19 pandemic has completely disrupted the world of sport, which has been one of the sectors hardest hit by the restrictions imposed. If we

really consider that sport has a key role in building social capital, fostering social inclusion and combating inequalities, if we really trust in the educational impact of sport and recognise its beneficial effects on health and quality of life, we should seriously reconsider our sports policies.

The new text of the revised European Sports Charter of the Council of Europe is there to enable us to do this. The Assembly warmly welcome this new text and its recognition that access to sport for all is a fundamental right, and that all human beings have an inalienable right of access to sport in a healthy environment.

We must incorporate sport into recovery and resilience plans and mechanisms and integrate support measures for sport into economic and social sustainable development strategies, taking due account of its links with other sectors such as health, education, tourism, construction, transport, media, retail and others; we must ensure that a fair share of the resources allocated to the sport sector – including at regional and local levels – are used to support the recovery of grass-roots sport.

Finally, our sports policies must deal more effectively with the threats to sports ethics. We need to implement the relevant standards and sanctions to protect the integrity of sports competitions from manipulation and adopt new ones, to set up and support whistle-blowing mechanisms and to provide, in co-operation with sports organisations, awareness programmes and training in sports ethics and integrity.

The Macolin Convention is not an option: all our States must ratify it, and they should also encourage ratification by non-European States, as this is a global battle against transnational organised crime in which we need to stand together.

Thank you for your attention.