

Round table 2

The Council of Europe Conventions on Safety and Security at Sports Events

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Introductory presentation

1. Racism, hate speech and other types of discrimination in sport

Sport is an incredibly powerful instrument for upholding human rights and promoting the values of respect, fairness, tolerance, equality, inclusion and solidarity.

It is also the mirror of our societies and this mirror sadly continues to reflect national, social, economic and political tensions, sometimes magnified by the exposure that incidents of racism and hate speech gain at major sports events.

Racism and discrimination in sport has been a prevalent issue over history worldwide. Its impact has been highlighted on a regular basis by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU). Many striking examples and research show that racist abuse, including hate speech, and racial discrimination are still prevalent today in sporting events across Europe and beyond. Racist incidents and abuse are frequently reported in a number of sports, in particular in team sports such as football.

The Council of Europe has several relevant international treaties and standards in this field notably the European Convention on Human Rights and the Saint-Denis Convention, and closely monitors their

implementation by States Parties. The case law of the European Court on Human rights in the field of human rights in sport is also very relevant.

These are four of the concerned Council of Europe monitoring bodies and other Committees:

- The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI);
- The Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI);
- The Standing Committee of the Spectator Violence Convention (T-RV); and
- The Committee of the Saint-Denis Convention (T-S4).

The ECRI has played an important role in setting standards and monitoring this area. My colleague Johan FRIESTEDT, Executive Secretary of ECRI, will address this topic more in detail after me.

The Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI), was set up by the Committee of Ministers in 2019 to promote equality for all and build more inclusive societies, offering effective protection from discrimination and hate and where diversity is respected.

In the second part of my intervention, I will address more in detail the role of the T-RV and T-S4 Committees.

I would also recall four of our reference documents in this field:

- ***PACE Resolution 2276 (2019): [Stop hate speech and acts of hatred in sport;](#)***
- ***Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2019)1: [Preventing and combating sexism;](#)***
- ***ECRI Recommendation n.12: [Combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport;](#) and***
- ***ECRI Recommendation n.15: [Combating hate speech](#)***

Racism, hate speech and other types of discrimination express themselves in and through many different ways around sport. I will just highlight two of them which are increasingly a matter of concern: the use of social media and anti-semitism.

The huge development of Internet and social media has been an effective tool both to denounce racism and hate speech but also to promote it in a massive and uncontrolled way, thus causing an unprecedented damage to the victims, whether they are individuals or organisations.

Let me just to take one of the most recent incidents, occurred last week at the end of the Europa League Final and reported by the international media.

The England striker Marcus Rashford has received more racist abuse after Manchester United lost this match. He wrote on his Twitter account: "At least 70 racial slurs on my social accounts counted so far. For those working to make me feel any worse than I already do, good luck trying."

In January, Rashford said he was subjected to "social media at its worst" after receiving racist abuse following a draw with Arsenal.

Many players have spoken out about the racist abuse they get online this season and there have been many calls for social media companies to do more about the people who do it.

The UK government has previously threatened social media companies with "large fines" which could amount to "billions of pounds" if they fail to tackle abuse on their platforms.

In a similar manner, antisemitism has also been an issue of concern. Research has found that examples of this have been on the rise in recent past, one example being antisemitic displays at sports events.

Racial discrimination in sport can also be less obvious and evident than racist fan behaviour; for example, although minority groups may be well represented as athletes in certain sport disciplines, they have been under-represented among management, administrative and coaching staff.

Equal treatment, diversity and inclusiveness of all participants in a sporting event are key factors to ensure a safe, secure and welcoming event. Managers, workers, athletes and spectators should represent as much as possible the diversity of society, so as to ensure a safe and secure environment at sports venues. Special attention should be addressed by sport organisers to minorities and vulnerable groups, in terms of physical conditions of the venue and the operation of the event, so as to ensure that the event is inclusive and all participants are treated equally and in a respectful manner.

2. The Saint-Denis Convention as a common framework against racism and hate speech at sports events

I would like to share with you the related work of the Conventional Committee of the Saint-Denis Convention of 2016 with which I work.

As the European Convention on Spectator Violence, from 1985, is gradually being replaced by the Saint-Denis Convention, I will just focus on this one.

Very briefly, let me just mention the main activities and documents released in the field of racism and hate speech:

1. The Recommendation Rec(2015)1, of both Committees, comprising all high European standards in the field of safety, security and (customer)

service at sports events. It was revised before the pandemic and further enriched with human rights dimensions, namely by focusing on inclusiveness and diversity of all participants.

2. The annual report on trends and challenges related with violence and disorder at sports events, published since 2016. This report, which is mostly based on police data and statistics, has been progressively enhanced. In particular the latest annual reports - 2018/19 and 2019/20 - confirm that racism and other types of discriminatory behaviour are on the rise and urgent measures need to be adopted by States. It is important to note that half of the States have special programmes in place to prevent and respond to sport-related racist and other discriminatory behaviour. Such programmes should be a part of a wider national strategy dedicated to prevention and tackling this kind of incidents and involve the participation of all relevant stakeholders. Moreover, in a number of States there is still room for improvement of police statistics reporting this type of incidents, so we can have a better picture across Europe.

3. The Saint-Denis Convention”, which was adopted in 2016 and entered into force in 2017, has now 20 ratifications and 16 signatures. This modern treaty calls for an integrated and multi-agency approach in strengthening the safety, security and service pillars at sporting events. It strengthens the call for the protection and promotion of human rights, namely by imposing a positive obligation to States Parties to “incorporate clear policies and procedures on matters that might impact on crowd management and associated safety and security risks, in particular: **any racist or other discriminatory behaviour**” (Art. 5.5).

4. The open online course on “Human Rights in Sports”, launched in 2019 by the HELP and the Sport Conventions teams. This course stresses the role of Council of Europe treaties, and the protection provided by the ECHR and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights in the field of sport.

5. The open online course to promote the Saint-Denis Convention and the 2015 recommendation, which comprises the human rights dimension of this Convention.

6. The comprehensive report of the round table organised in 2019 by T-RV Committee on hate speech, racism and other types of discrimination at football and other sports events. This report updates information both on national policies and practices, and case law, standards and initiatives of the Council of Europe in this field.

7. The [report](#), published late 2020, on the impact of COVID-19 on sports events. This report focuses on the huge negative impact of the pandemic on human rights of participants at sports events, in particular minorities and disabled people and calls for a particular attention do be paid to these groups in the return of spectators to stadia.

8. The Committee of the Saint-Denis Convention, which met for the first time mid-April 2021. Its Policy Strategy for 2021-2025 sets as objective to: “Ensure that the human rights, hate speech, anti-racism and anti-discrimination dimensions are streamlined in any standard setting work of the Committee”.

This Committee will be assisted by three Advisory Groups – Monitoring, Standard Setting/Legal Issues and International Cooperation. Through these Groups, the Committee will enhance:

a) standards, namely on topics like artificial intelligence and the impact of sanitary crises on sports events, namely on participants with special needs; and

b) monitoring guidelines, including monitoring visits, country profiles and annual reports covering, in particular, the topics of hate speech, racism and other discriminations.

These monitoring activities should be more coordinated with the ones of other monitoring bodies, namely ECRI.

9. In the context of the launching of the Saint-Denis Committee, we held a Leadership Dialogue event on the topic of “The Saint-Denis Convention as a common framework against racism and hate speech at sports events”.

The participants acknowledged the serious impact of such behaviours, identified emerging challenges and exchanged on how to prevent and respond to them.

Several participants expressed concern about the lack of determined action by sports organisations, implying that sanctions were not always effective and fair and that more needs to be done to engage with athletes, supporters and the media. Structural problems were also mentioned as creating fertile ground for discrimination, in particular against people from different ethnic origin, women and LGBTI people. Inclusive education, gender equality and changes in sport governance to guarantee diversity in their management were often mentioned as steps needed to address structural problems. Governments should also enact clear laws, develop policies and engage with the sport movement to address the problem.

The Saint-Denis Committee intends to closely monitor the incidence of hate speech, racism and other discriminatory behaviour at sports events, notably by further working with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, ECRI and CDADI.

To conclude, I would highlight the following notes:

1. Sport should be human rights-based and human-rights oriented, and it should be further used as an outstanding tool to promote human values and principles;
2. Sport is the mirror of society and is not immune to violence, racism and hate speech;
3. These phenomena are complex and therefore request an integrated multiagency approach to ensure that the response is quick, firm and effective;

4. As regards safety, security and service at sports events, it is consensual that the key factor to ensure a safe, secure and welcoming environment is to treat all participants in an respectful, equal, inclusive and diverse manner; and
5. As a transversal and complex societal issue, racism, hate speech and other discriminations should require an integrated multiagency approach, combining the efforts of the various CoE bodies and monitoring mechanisms and all the relevant public and private stakeholders.

Thank you for your attention.