

Forum on Sport and Human Rights

Opening statement Jeroen SCHOKKENBROEK

1 June 2021

- Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends
- Welcome to this Forum on Sport and Human Rights, organised by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) of the Council of Europe.
- It is a chance and a responsibility for the Council of Europe to be not only the main human rights Organisation in Europe, but also the home of EPAS and some important European Treaties on different questions related to sport. It is a chance, for it allows the creation of linkages and combining expertise between what is often -wrongly – seen as two different worlds: human rights and sport. But it is also a responsibility: to create and seize opportunities for such interaction.
- I am very pleased that in recent years, we have seen a strong determination to do precisely that:
- Between November 2020 and February 2021, the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) organised the 16th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport. The question of sport and human rights was one of the two main topics addressed, after two years of preparatory work, stemming from the previous Conference of Ministers, held in Tbilisi in 2018.
- During the Conference, Ministers recognised and stressed the necessity to strengthen the cooperation between the sport sector, with EPAS primarily, and the multiple monitoring and intergovernmental bodies on human rights issues, relevant to the world of sport.
- A resolution was adopted, [Resolution n.2](#) on Human rights in sport, inviting EPAS to:
 - o make the protection of human rights a priority.
 - o develop co-operation with the European Committee on Social Rights to ensure athlete's social rights are protected.
 - o to hold regular exchanges with relevant Council of Europe intergovernmental and monitoring bodies to share information on the topic.
- The background document referred to 12 human rights topics in sport, which should stay in the focus of EPAS's work. Of the 12 topics mentioned in the Resolution, today's Forum will focus on 7 of them. Among those which were set aside, some will be extensively covered by other events organised by EPAS in the course of 2021, for example safeguarding children in sport (via the Child Safeguarding in Sport "CSiS" project, the Start to Talk Initiative and the EPAS Consultative Committee Webinar that will take place after tomorrow) or the rights of

transgender and intersex athletes in sports competitions that will be addressed by the EPAS Diversity Conference on 20 September.

- It is on this premise that today's event was conceptualised: to discuss some of the most prominent human rights concerns in sport with the relevant Council of Europe monitoring and intergovernmental bodies, and explore the possibility of establishing a strong and fruitful cooperation between such bodies and the world of sport.
- Participants today mainly include governmental experts from the EPAS Governing Board, and for Consultative committee members. However, we chose to invite the Bureaus of the different Conventions Committees, T-DO, T-RV, T-S4, and the State parties to the Macolin Convention, as many of the issues that will be discussed today are central to their work as well.
- The topics and objectives of today's discussion are also in line with the priorities identified by the Council of Europe's Secretary General in the Strategic Framework for the Council of Europe. These include, among others, the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights, freedom of expression, fighting social inequalities, discriminations, racism and xenophobia, the fight against human trafficking.
- Ladies and gentlemen,
- Sport is not necessarily the first sector that comes to mind when thinking about human rights abuses, but the question of sport and human rights is extremely high on the international sports policy agenda, including that of the sports movement. The Council of Europe is a key institution for promoting and monitoring human rights standards, therefore it has a very important role to play in ensuring human rights are upheld in all aspects of society.
- I see today's Forum as a place where specialists from the world of sport meet representatives of different human rights sectors and institutions of the Council of Europe. Looking at the programme for this morning, I note that we have a very strong and interesting line-up, and I warmly thank all introducers, discussants and other speakers for their presence and input.
- With that, I wish you all interesting and inspiring discussions. Thank you for your attention.