

Further developing the European Sports Model

The European Sports Model (ESM) is an essential pillar of the organisation of sport in Europe. It is organised in an autonomous, democratic and territorial basis with a pyramid structure. It encompasses all levels of sport, from grassroots to elite, comprises both club and national team competitions and includes mechanisms to ensure financial solidarity and open competitions, such as the principle of promotion and relegation;

Over the years, the ESM has become part of Europe's shared culture, bringing together millions of citizens regardless of their origins. It has produced a multitude of positive benefits, including contributions to education, social inclusion and public health. It has also delivered success in making of sport a large and fast-growing sector of the economy, thus contributing to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as well as the creation of jobs in Europe;

The ESM is a success story and should be explicitly recognised and further developed. Although no binding definition of the ESM currently exists, this model has been described and acknowledged by different European Institutions. This document aims to describe its key elements, stakeholders and, furthermore, the parts that are at stake and need to be preserved.

It calls for joint action from public authorities and the sports movement to preserve this model in order to ensure that sport continues to fulfil its societal role – in line with the Council of Europe's core values – and be run in the interests of the many in Europe.

The practice of sport is decreasing in all layers of society as new forms of entertainment multiply and the modes of dissemination of sport events are diversifying, contributing to the emergence of new non-conventional actors. While acknowledging the existence of non-organised sport and physical recreation activities, as well as the emergence of commercial sports providers, the ESM reflects the main and specific model of organised sport in Europe. As the COVID-19 crisis threatens to reverse progress made in many social domains, this values-based-approach has never been so central to helping build more inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies.

It is urgent to work together to consolidate the values-based model and its economic environment via which sport develops through the sport movement (clubs and federations) by making it an integral part of shared European culture. By doing so we can keep sport as a strong partner to public authorities and make sure it remains a low-cost values-based activity accessible to all and with high socio-economic and health advantages.

This is about by forging an alliance at the level of the European continent between public authorities and the sports movement based on shared values and vision.

A. Key Features of the European Sports Model

The core stakeholders of the ESM are Federations (National, Continental, and International), Olympic Committees, Sport Confederations, Clubs, Athletes, Coaches and Volunteers.

The main elements of the ESM are widely accepted as being:

a) pyramid structure with a mutually reinforced system of solidarity, with grassroots sport including school sport at the base – where everyone has the possibility to engage in sport locally, thereby promoting the idea of “sport for all”; and elite sport at the top – sportsmen and sportswomen can participate to different

level of competitions organized based on their age and skill and are able to move up from the base of the pyramid and boosting the profile of European competitions, which in turn generate public interest and revenue streams which are reinvested on the development of the given sport and spread across its core stakeholders

b) values-based model – grounded in the specific nature of sport, based on its fundamental social, educational and cultural values (ethics, fair play, respect, solidarity, integrity, volunteerism, regard for human rights, innovation and sustainability), helping as partners to deliver on governmental and public policies from national, European and global (e.g. UNSDGs), contributes to (inter-) territorial development, fosters integration, tolerance, well-being and health, contributes to environmental protection, gender equality and social cohesion;

c) financial solidarity schemes¹ – allows, in addition to public funding, revenue streams generated through events and activities at the elite level to be redistributed and reinvested at the lower levels through development, education and social programmes for players, coaches, officials, equipment and infrastructure but also communities and societies at large; financial solidarity between competitions is also vital to ensuring that less or not profitable competitions (often e.g. youth competitions) can still take place through cross funding from more profitable competitions.

d) one federation per sport or per multisport sectoral activity and per country – being the recognised partner of public authorities plays a fundamental role in establishing rules and regulations, standards of sports facilities and equipment; ensuring the development of young athletes, education of referees, and an increase in grassroots participation; managing competitions by coordinating the sports calendar and ensuring fairness of competitions, integrity and health and safety for all athletes, particularly in relation to the manipulation of sports competitions and doping; ensuring and overseeing the appropriate involvement of all relevant stakeholder organisations for players, clubs, leagues, fans etc.

e) open competitions – accessible through a promotion/relegation system which maintains a competitive balance and gives priority to sporting merit;

f) a structure based on voluntary activities – the backbone of European sport, without which the whole sports movement in the vast majority of European countries would cease to exist;

g) the legitimate autonomy of sport – enabling sports organisations to pursue sporting objectives and take decisions to best suit the interests of the development, organisation and competitions of sport in a manner that – as much as possible – is not subject to political influence. Such autonomy ensures the universality of sport, its values and its rules, as well as the integrity of sports competitions. In this sense, good-governance in sport shall be a condition for the autonomy and self-regulation of sports organisations, in compliance with the principles of transparency, accountability and democracy².

B. Risks to recognise and challenges to address together

The key components of the organisation of organised sport in Europe are under threat because the **values-based sport organisations are losing ground to the purely profit-oriented goals of commercial sport providers**. Sport organisations can certainly co-exist with commercial sport companies as it allows for cooperation around new and innovative ways to present sports in formats that appeal to changing

¹ UEFA's HatTrick assistance programme is one of the largest solidarity and development programmes ever to be established by a sports organisation, based on the simple idea of ploughing a large proportion of the European championship (EURO) revenue back into football development in three (hence its name) different ways: investment, education and knowledge-sharing. HatTrick funding contributes more than €150m annually to football – from the strengthening of women's football and the construction of pitches for local communities to ground-breaking social responsibility projects. By 2024, the HatTrick programme will have made a remarkable €2.6 billion available to its member associations.

With 90% of its revenues going back to sport and athletes' development, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) ensures the global participation and diversity of sport by funding International Sports Federations, National Olympic Committees and athletes and coaches from countries with the greatest financial need. This solidarity model raises the equivalent of USD 5 billion for the four-year period of an Olympiad to support athletes and sports organisations worldwide.

² See [Olympic Agenda 2020](#), [Olympic Agenda 2020+5](#), [ASOIF IF review](#)

consumer and audience behaviors. However, applying a purely market-based approach to sport would cut the link between grassroots (and mainly youth) and elite sport thereby jeopardizing the Council of Europe's **vision of an ethical, inclusive and safe sport that or all, contributing to address the challenges facing society.**

Non recognition of the European Sport Model would lead to:

- **Decrease in attractiveness and revenue of national leagues** by breaking down the connection between participation and sporting merits. The priority given to commercial interest will also jeopardize the system of **promotion and relegation** in competitions which constitutes the backbone of the ESM.
- Decrease of revenues for values-based sport organisations to the profit of commercial actors would negatively impact the societal role of sport and lead to a reduction of resources to allocate to **solidarity mechanisms between top and grassroots** level allowing for investments in youth, accessible and local sport. Indeed, commercial event organisers are benefiting from the investment in youth, athletes, training and officials. However, these organisations do not invest any share of revenue in these priorities, thereby failing to contribute to the social mission of sport and endangering the sustainability of the organised sport in Europe.
- **Respecting the sporting calendar and the release of players for national Teams competitions.** National team competitions are an integral part of the European sports model. They play an essential role not only in terms of fostering national identity and inspiring young athletes to reach the highest level of sporting performance, but also by promoting solidarity with grassroots. Private sport organisers must accept the windows for national team competitions. By organising parallel match days, the participation of the best players in their national team competitions would be prevented, the fairness of the competitions and the interest of fans compromised and an absence of a level playing field for national teams created.
- The key role of sport governing bodies to govern their respective sport by safeguarding a level playing field and **preserving the integrity, health and safety of sport of all those participating in sport at all levels.**

Agreed by representatives of the following organizations members of the EPAS Consultative Committee:

- EOC – European Olympic Committees
- UEFA - Union of European Football Associations
- GAISF - Global Association of International Sports Federations
- ENGSO - European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation
- ISF – International School Sport Federations
- EUSA - European University Sports Association
- FIAS - International SAMBO Federation