

## **Speaking notes for Matjaž Gruden**

### **Breakfast Roundtable on Sport officiating and gender equality**

**08 March 2024**

Good morning and welcome to the third Breakfast Roundtable on Women in Sport, organized by the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, on the occasion of International Women's Day – 8 March.

This Breakfast Roundtable is a part of our long-standing effort to combat discrimination in sport and help prevail the rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Sports Charter. These rights include the right to non-discrimination and the respect of human dignity of all. They oblige us to strive for gender equality in all aspects.

Throughout history, sport has served as a powerful platform for fostering unity, promoting teamwork, and celebrating the potential of the human spirit. Yet, despite its transformative power, the realm of sports has often been marred by disparities and biases based on gender. Today we are here not just to reaffirm our commitment to dismantling these barriers and creating a level playing field where talent, skill, and merit are the only measures of success, but also explore new ways in which to achieve these objectives.

For this 3rd Edition of our Roundtable on gender equality in sport we have decided to focus on an issue of profound importance, one that resonates not only within the realm of sport but within the broader context of societal progress: gender equality in sport officiating. How to ensure dignity, fairness, inclusivity and equal opportunities in the arena of sports officiating. By fostering an environment that embraces diversity and champions inclusion, we not only enrich the fabric of sport but also uphold the fundamental principles of fairness and justice.

We are not starting from scratch.

Our joint project with European Union, "All In Plus – Promoting greater gender equality in sport" resumed last year.

This project is centered around 3 pillars:

1) a new round of data collection that will help us assess progress towards gender balance in sport in 20 participating countries – and will allow us to prepare recommendations for improving the situation across Europe and beyond;

2) the creation of an online library of best practices on gender equality in sport;

and 3) concrete action to make media more sensitive to this issue, including awareness-raising informative sessions for sports media professionals, as well as the preparation of audiovisual content to give greater visibility to female sports professionals.

The “All In Plus” project will also raise awareness about officiating inequalities. The project started a year ago and its data collection campaign has now been formally launched in the 20 countries we work with.

Throughout this morning, our international experts and guests will deliver presentations about initiatives and projects aiming to shed light on inequalities and officiating, and a number of speakers will share their own, personal experience.

We invite all those of you in the room today and joining remotely to use this panel session to ask questions of our panelists. The informal nature of this breakfast roundtable is deliberate; it is meant to promote open discussion.

I expect that today's discussions will inspire innovative solutions, foster collaboration and pave the way for further progress towards genuine gender equality in sport officiating.

I wish to thank all participants for your commitment to this important cause. I also want to express admiration for those who will be sharing their stories with us, how they suffered from discrimination while officiating, and their determination to take a stand against gender inequality in sport, despite the pressure and abuses inflicted on them. I am particularly delighted to extend a warm welcome to our esteemed guest, Charlotte Girard-Fabre, Secretary General of the International Federation for Sport Officials, and Chair of the EPAS Consultative Committee.

Equality is a core Council of Europe value which the Organization strives to promote on a daily basis, not only on International Women's Day. But the attention given to equality on this day is an opportunity to put the spotlight on a subject that is frequently neglected. Referees are subject to hate speech on and off the sports pitch and women referees suffer from abuse to an even greater extent.

Every sport has its own specific set of rules and referees are there to make sure they are being followed. But there are rules which apply to all sports. They start with the respect of human rights, human dignity and equality for all. When these rules and principles are disregarded, a sport is no longer a sport, it becomes a shameful spectacle. This is intolerable and we should not let it stand. We will not let it stand. Thank you all for being here.