Closing speech

Hanne Juncher, Director of Security, Integrity and Rule of Law, Council of Europe
19th Conference of Ministers Responsible for Sport – Monaco, 4 November 2026
"Safer and Healthier Sport for All Children"

Dear President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,

Dear Chair of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Dear Chair of the EPAS Consultative Committee,

Ministers, distinguished delegates, experts and colleagues,

As we conclude the 19th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport, I would like to thank the Principality of Monaco for its warm hospitality, and all the delegations, experts and participants who have contributed to our discussions today.

In 2018, EPAS and the "Start to Talk" project took on the difficult task of breaking the silence surrounding child sexual abuse in sport—and of shifting responsibility for preventing abuse and responding to it away from victims and towards those with the power and duty to act.

Eight years on, we have brought the issue of safer and healthier sport for all children to the highest political level. Protecting children and young athletes—particularly those in vulnerable situations—is central to the integrity of sport and a shared responsibility for public authorities, sports organisations, civil society and other stakeholders, as recognised in the European Sports Charter.

Sport has immense potential to support children's physical and mental health, development, inclusion and education. We have heard today how it can foster well-being, help children and young people overcome obstacles, and give them a sense of belonging. But these benefits cannot be taken for granted. Sport can also expose them to violence, abuse, discrimination, and physical and mental harm.

Our young speakers and delegates have drawn attention to how ENVIRONMENTS excessive pressure and power imbalances can contribute to substance use, concerns about body image, self-harm and mental health difficulties. They have also called for continued action to strengthen protection, address abuse and discrimination, and embed human rights in governance.

The Council of Europe recognises the significant efforts made by an increasing number of governments and organisations within the sports movement and civil society to advance these goals. There is, however, still a long way to go.

The resolution adopted today gives us a clear direction. It places the rights and best interests of children and young people, and their meaningful participation, at the heart of safer and healthier sport. It also makes clear that safeguarding cannot rely on reactive measures alone.

It requires prevention, education and cultural change, alongside stronger protection, trauma-informed redress systems, effective investigation, all underpinned by good governance, particularly transparency and accountability.

Today's discussions have shown that no single organisation can deliver this alone. Governments, sports organisations, specialist services, civil society, families, children and young people all have a part to play. We also recognise the importance of the expertise and voices of people with lived experience of abuse in shaping child-protection policy. Co-operation must be mainstreamed across governance frameworks and policies, with responsibilities clearly understood—not improvised when a crisis arises.

The Council of Europe has a distinctive role in supporting this work. Its standards and co-operation activities promote safety, integrity, equality and inclusion in sport, and help ensure that sport can remain a positive force for personal and social development. EPAS has a unique role in bringing public authorities and the sports movement together and will take forward the invitations set out in the resolution. Through "Start to Talk" and the Pool of International Experts on Safe Sport, it has already laid valuable foundations for further action. In co-operation with the MARS network, it can also help raise prosecutors' awareness of the modus operandi and specific dynamics of abuse in sport. This, in turn, can help strengthen criminal investigations and prosecutions, including in cases where abuse occurs in a sporting context.

There are also important opportunities to connect EPAS and the Council of Europe's Sport Conventions with other areas of the Organisation's work. The Lanzarote Committee's work to protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is highly relevant. The Council of Europe's work to combat trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants, together with the pharmaceutical crime convention's and Pompidou Group's expertise on substance use and addictive behaviours, can help address risks affecting children in sport. Separately, the Council of Europe's work on cybercrime can inform responses to online harms. Cyberbullying is a serious concern, and its implications for sport should be considered in future developments, drawing on relevant work across the Organisation, including with the fields of youth and education and under the Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention). I welcome, too, the contribution of the Parliamentary Assembly, whose perspective can help sustain political attention to these issues. By connecting expertise across the Council of Europe and making it accessible to member States, sports organisations and communities, we can help turn our commitments into meaningful practice.

The draft recommendation called for in the resolution adopted today will promote a co-ordinated approach across relevant policies. The "Start to Talk" project can provide tailored support to help you put these commitments into practice.

The Council of Europe stands ready to work with you, the sports movement and our partners to turn today's commitments into sustained action. Let us make sport a place where every child can participate safely and with dignity—and where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you.