

Combating Hate Speech in Sport project

LAUNCH CONFERENCE

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2.30pm

Room 2 - Palais

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Welcome all speakers and participants, I am delighted that so many distinguished experts and stakeholders have accepted our invitation to speak and participate today.

We are together for the first major event of the project "Combating Hate Speech in Sport". co-funded by the European Commission and the Council of Europe – another example of the excellent cooperation between the two organisations in many areas of common concern.

Sport is not just about health, competition and spectacle. It is also about values, and it contributes to an inclusive society. But for that, certain conditions need to be in place.

The Council of Europe works with state authorities and the sports movement to promote fair play and respect, as well as safety, integrity and good governance. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that human rights values, including countering discrimination and hate speech, are priority for all actors in the sport field. In order to encourage this commitment, our Strategic priorities 2022-2025 are centred on the promotion of human rights in sport.

Hate speech is clearly detrimental to human rights.

Hate speech, both online and offline, harms the individuals and groups that it targets by attacking and marginalising them, and by drowning their voices. Too often it is the trigger for hate crimes and violence. It also poses a direct threat to democracy by stifling open debate and minority opinions. By dehumanising individuals and normalising polarisation, it undermines social trust.

The Covid pandemic and the recent Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine further aggravated hate speech, particularly on-line. But the increase of hate speech was already noted before, for instance by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance. In some of its country monitoring reports, ECRI has flagged hate speech in the context of sport events as an area of concern, stressing that racism and xenophobia often express itself through hate speech in sports today.

The Council of Europe advocates an approach to preventing and combating hate speech that is human rights-based and comprehensive. It has articulated this approach in a new legal instrument, a CM Recommendation on Combating Hate Speech, which was adopted on 20 May by the Committee of Ministers, in its ministerial session at the close of the Italian Presidency. This recommendation gives detailed state-of-the-art guidance to Member states, firmly anchored in the case law of the ECtHR.

I am confident that the project we are launching today, on combatting hate speech in sport, will be an incubator for promising practices that can be shared in committees such as the steering committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) and inspire many member states.

The CoE has developed tools and methodologies to support states in developing and implementing policies against hate speech such as

- Using systemic design to involve all relevant stakeholders in building comprehensive strategies.
- We also offer online courses on hate Speech and Hate Crime, and
- guides and tools for awareness raising and educational initiatives towards the general public.

These tools and methodologies can be used in any area of life and public policy and certainly also in the field of sport. Sport authorities and sport organisations should be involved when designing comprehensive strategies against hate speech.

Equally, experts and activists experienced in combatting hate speech should be involved in policy-making on matters such as the prevention and countering of hate speech in sport. This project will be a great opportunity to connect the networks and share the knowledge wider.

We are working closely with member states to ensure safety, security and service at sports events, under an international treaty known as the Saint-Denis Convention. It is a valuable platform for legal and policy cooperation to address violence and misbehaviour, including hate speech. Sport is also the mirror of our societies, and this mirror sadly continues to reflect social and political tensions, sometimes magnified by the exposure that incidents of racism and hate speech get at large sports events.

The goal of the Saint-Denis Convention is to go beyond the law enforcement approach to spectator violence, towards a holistic *modus operandi*, including prevention, education, awareness-raising and a welcoming environment, and thus to discourage hostility and decrease tension. When people feel respected and treated with dignity by everyone – by the management, the police and the service providers, as well as the other teams' supporters, they also behave respectfully to others. The ethos of the Convention is that all of the professions involved in organising sport events need to work together towards that result.

The stakeholders of the Saint-Denis convention will benefit from the results of the project and will also contribute their know-how.

One of the challenges in addressing hate speech – as in any policy field indeed - is to be sure that measures that have been put in place really have an impact. We therefore need evidence-based policies and practices, and a "knowledge hub" for sharing data, lessons learned, and capacity building tools.

This new project will set up a unique online resource centre to provide the relevant information on the existing tools that can be used and adapted to address hate speech in sport, identify promising practice, for instance those developed in the context of the No Hate Speech Movement campaign, the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy, the programme of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport and other CoE relevant instruments.

Dear participants, today you will discuss one of the most prominent human rights concerns in sport, in the light of the work of the relevant Council of Europe bodies, inputs from the

participating countries and international organisations, and athletes. It will be, I hope, an opportunity to exchange and to learn, and to start building a strong network to deal with hate speech in sport in a resolute and effective manner.

I wish you a fruitful and inspiring afternoon