

Forum on Sport and Human Rights

Wednesday, 30 November 2022

9.00am

Palais de l'Europe

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Speaking notes

Dear guests,
Dear participants,
Dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this second Forum on Sport and Human Rights, organised by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) of the Council of Europe.

The on-going World Cup in Qatar is a striking reminder of the power of sport to touch billions of people and capture media attention and fuelling social media conversations across the globe. Major sport events are not only about sport competitions at the highest level, but also a scene for adulated athletes to share views about many defining issues of our time - violence, discrimination, exclusion, climate change, gender inequality – to mention just a few. By stimulating exchange about such issues, sport has the capacity to shape values and to guide decisions affecting the broader society, including human rights.

Indeed, the potential of sport to promote human rights is a key reason for the Council of Europe's work in this field, just like the need to protect human rights in sport.

Human rights in and through sport underpins the work of EPAS, guided by the European Sports Charter, which promotes "sport for all", values-based sport and multi-stakeholder governance of sport. During the 16th Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport in 2021, the Ministers adopted a Resolution on human rights in sport, encouraging EPAS to make the protection of human rights a priority and to co-operate with relevant intergovernmental and monitoring bodies to share information on human rights in sport. Hence the launch of the EPAS Forum on Sport and Human Rights initiative.

The Forum aims to facilitate the discussions among those actively involved in sport, and other stakeholders, to explore challenges in an interdisciplinary perspective and identify ways of addressing them by the different actors, including through standard-setting, capacity-building or other type of action by the Council of Europe.

Last year, the first edition of the Forum was quite general, covering a range of topics, from data protection and the economic and social rights of athletes to human trafficking, racism and tackling other types of discrimination in sport.

The 2022 edition of the Forum on Sport and Human Rights will be more focused and examine the highly intertwined areas of freedom of expression, media, gender (in)equalities and hate speech in sport.

- 1) First, we will focus on **freedom of expression of athletes**, starting from a review of the legal framework and relevant case law, and listening to the athletes and their representatives. There could be no more appropriate moment for this discussion than today.
- 2) Then, we will discuss **freedom of the press** and investigative journalism in sport, as analyse the obstacles journalists and media outlets are facing in this highly competitive and commercialised field.
- 3) The third session will dive into **gender equality and the media**. This topic is particularly relevant to us in the view of the upcoming joint European Union – Council of Europe project "*All In Plus*", through which we will engage with media professionals to sensitise them to help avoid biased coverage and stereotypical gender portrayal across sports reporting.
- 4) Finally, we will explore the issue of **combating hate speech in sport** and its different dimensions, such as sexism, the online environment, including some personal experiences, and will discuss strategies of addressing hate speech in sport.

As Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights states: "*Everyone has the right to freedom of expression*". While this right is by no means absolute, it is a fundamental one to safeguard democracy and protect the entire human rights system from authoritarian and populist assault. Freedom of expression also applies in the world of sport, and we should make sure that this fundamental right has practical effect in that setting.

I am very glad to see the representatives of the EPAS Governing Board and the Consultative Committee in the audience today. I am delighted that a key sector of the Council of Europe with regard to freedom of expression, is also represented: the Steering committee for media and information society (CDMSI), thank you Chair for being with us.

I would also like to give a warm welcome to all the governmental and non-governmental delegates, members of the sport movement, athletes, journalists, academics and many others participating in the Forum. I want to thank all the experts presenting today for their ideas and invaluable contributions to our common endeavour to promote human rights in and through sport.

We have invited the various Sport Convention Committees of the CoE to follow the Forum, as their work is closely linked to the issues that will be discussed today. I see this Forum as a platform of exchange of expertise, knowledge and experience, and I am anticipating some very interesting discussions.

Once again, thank you to all the moderators, panellists and other speakers for your active participation and contributions, and I wish you a productive meeting.