

**Annual Conference on
“Newly arrived migrants and their integration via sport”
Vienna, 2-3 June 2016**

**Speech by Carmen Kiefer
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
Council of Europe
Round table: Facilitating access to local networks and communities
3 June 2016**

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank EPAS for involving the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in this important event. It is a great pleasure for me to address this Conference on behalf of the Congress, which lays great store by sport as a means of promoting understanding and solidarity but also of promoting integration.

In the case of newly arrived migrants, which are the target group of this conference, it seems appropriate to use ways to integrate these people rapidly especially when there are language barriers. Art is one of these ways. Sport can also be one of the answers to the challenge of how to achieve integration of migrants. Sport offers a structure within which everyone is welcome. It enables all citizens to be actively involved in the community, even a new one. Engaging in sports activities with fellow citizens helps to bring down barriers, and awakens a sense of belonging, a spirit of community-mindedness. Sport provides an opportunity to forge links with fellow human beings thereby avoiding exclusion and isolation.

Local and regional authorities play a major role in developing sports infrastructures and providing sports facilities in their communities, supporting sports clubs and associations, opening sports schools and organising events to involve citizens in local life and bring them together around sporting activities. Sports very often is a regional competence, as is integration and the grassroots level is indeed a source of many good initiatives in the field including for newly arrived migrants.

As a local elected representative I should like to take this opportunity to mention a grassroots project in my region, the Land Salzburg¹, as an example of the approach to sport as a means of fostering integration and participation. Many – especially local – authorities have activities in this field. Activities are for example the **“Casinos Austria Integration World Cup in Salzburg”**, which is a “world championship tournament” with “national teams” from the different countries of origin. During an integration weekend about 200 “country” games are played. Stating that “sport speaks all languages” the organising association emphasises the similarities rather than the differences between the countries. Asylum seekers from the adjacent camp are also invited to play.

This project is an example of a joint action of civil society - including private firms - political and religious authorities for a common goal: integration.

Representatives of religious communities living in Salzburg support the event. Political authorities are involved at all levels: federal (President, Foreign Affairs and Integration Minister), regional (Land of Salzburg) and local (City of Salzburg’s Integration Office).

The main sponsor – a private firm - recognises the benefits of his support. He is proud that he joined the rapidly growing competition four years ago and "that as a partner he is able to take civic responsibility in a sustainable way and actively provide support for issues such as integration and show the flag of this event."

The Salzburg integration soccer tournament which started in 2006 is now recognised as a success story. The UEFA describes it as "impressive" and classified it already formally under the best grassroots projects in Europe.

The 2016 edition was held last weekend. A total of 48 football teams from around the world took part in it. [show video (2 minutes)² and pictures]

¹ <http://www.integrationsfussball.at/>

² <https://www.dropbox.com/s/5s3pr1pwjii7si/INTEGRATIONS-WM-2015-UEFA-CUT.mp4?dl=0>
<http://tvthek.orf.at/program/Salzburg-heute/70019/Salzburg-heute/12840419/Integrationsfussball-WM/12843870>

The Integration World Cup is not only a great example of integration but also of sport as a means to unite people. I am rather proud to say that I was part of the the first integration World Cup women's team for Salzburg as goalkeeper - not very successfully– as we were eliminated in the preliminary round against Brazil, but still...

I would also like to give another example. In my home town of Kuchl which had 7000 inhabitants in 2015, 120 refugees from 19 nations spent the in summer in a student residence. Apart from the many volunteers who helped spontaneously, the local football club invited the asylum seekers for the first home match as spectators - this was their first contact with the local population. The young boys and men marched with homemade banners and supported Kuchler home team better than any local fan club. This was a great moment to break the ice and from then on, the young asylum seekers often played football on the association's football field.

The same certainly has been happening in many Austrian municipalities. Asylum seekers are individually well integrated in football clubs and engaged as fixed players in the teams.

It is even easier when the newcomers already have a connection with a specific sport. So, currently 6 young Syrians are training in the Salzburg Circus School - a private club. They had already been enrolled in a circus school in their home. Or the example of an Iranian volleyball player, who had already played at home in the national team, who was welcomed by the volleyball federation for training. In my skating club there was an Iranian girl, who practiced inline skating at home. We mounted ice runners on her roller skates and she is today practicing ice skating with enthusiasm.

One can say that many sports clubs in the cities and towns generally like to take people interested in their sport, as long as space is available. Whether nationals or foreigners, everyone is welcome from a sport point of view. What can be overwhelming is the sheer number of asylum seekers, as mostly only a few people can be integrated into the ongoing sports activities in a given club.

In addition to the clubs, there are many private initiatives, which offer free sports opportunities (running courses, climbing, football). Most of the time integration works when there are a limited number of candidates.

This finding has also been confirmed by a report based on research commissioned by the Austrian Olympic Committee to combine sport and integration, to initiate activities in the Federal State and,

inter alia, to offer asylum seekers a sports activity.

Current projects include sports spots in an asylum settlement called the “Kasern”: swimming courses, running courses, and much more.

The aim of all these activities is to provide asylum seekers with the opportunity to practice sports onsite in asylum settlements and to solve the problem of excessively high number of people that clubs cannot integrate. Unfortunately, the action is limited as there is often a lack of the available halls! Hall capacities are already a scarce commodity for the clubs themselves. Available sports facilities as well as accommodation for asylum seekers is a big issue for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

After these examples in my region here in Austria I would like to recall that the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities recognises the importance of sport.

This is because sport has many qualities and serves many purposes. In 2008, the Congress adopted a *resolution on integration through sport*³ that underlines the important role local and regional authorities play in promoting the practise of sports and in creating the necessary conditions so that all groups of society have equal access to sports facilities without discrimination. This is particularly important for the most vulnerable groups in our society, including people of immigrant background.

Regarding the integration of migrants, I would like to mention that following several debates during the Congress sessions the Current Affairs Committee has recently undertaken the preparation of a report with the title *"From reception to integration: the role of local authorities facing migration"*. In this report we will examine how local and regional authorities in our member States deal with refugees and migrants from the moment of their reception to their social and economic integration in the countries where they have settled. We will look at the challenges they face and the solutions they have found. The report will also underline the importance of the respect for human rights, the rule of law and the aim to build inclusive, intercultural societies. It will address specific issues related to

³ Resolution 250(2008) on integration through sport

specific groups: children, youth, women and minorities. We intend to give examples of good practice from local authorities on the integration of migrants in the host countries.

Sport will indeed be mentioned among the means to integrate migrants and I will be happy to bring back the results of our fruitful discussions here in Vienna to the Congress rapporteur.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will conclude by saying that the Congress wholeheartedly supports the substantial work carried out by the the Council of Europe's Youth and Sport Directorate and in particular by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) as a key element of the competence of the Organisation. It is important and timely to stress the link between sport and the cohesion of our societies especially in the current situation when Europe is facing the challenge of receiving and integrating new migrants.

Thank you for your attention.