



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

The European Sport Model

A call for the sports movement and public authorities to join forces

The European Sport Model, which reflects the specific organisation of sport in Europe, is under threat. To protect this model and ensure that sport continues to be run in the interests of the many in Europe, we call for joint action from the sports movement and public authorities.

➤ **High-level political support is required.**

A strong European Sport Model, supported by robust solidarity funding mechanisms and managed by well-governed federations, is key to enable public authorities to deliver on their policy objectives for sport in Europe. High-level political support from EU Member States is crucial to guarantee the safeguarding of the European Sport Model and the societal role of sport, for the benefit of the EU Member States and beyond.

Investing in sport is even more important in the current COVID-19 context. Indeed, never has sport been so central to helping our society's health, socialisation, education and general sense of well-being, and this will be key in the post-pandemic new way of life to re-launch social and economic activities. That is why the IOC is calling on all national governments to include sport in their recovery plans and why the IOC has extended its cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen the joint efforts to promote healthy lifestyles, including physical activity, sport and active recreation as a tool for health.

➤ **The sports movement has the responsibility to uphold principles of good governance, transparency and integrity in all its activities.**

Good governance is a part of the Fundamental Principles of Olympism. And as the leader of the Olympic Movement, and based on its Olympic Agenda 2020, the IOC works with the various stakeholders of the Movement to help enhance governance across all levels, better protect its athletes, continue to fight corruption and doping, and become more transparent.

In a world where disparities and social division are increasing, where gender inequalities persist, where environmental risks threaten a large part of the population and where global health challenges are multiplying, a new form of social organisation seems essential. **By taking into account the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social educational function when taking decisions with regard to sport, public authorities can give the Lisbon Treaty, which marked an important milestone for the sports ecosystem, a new meaning in today's world.**

A comprehensive solidarity model

The European Sport Model is characterised by a number of key features:

- a) **a pyramid structure with a mutually reinforcing system of solidarity, with grassroots/amateur sport at the base** – where everyone has the possibility of engaging in sport locally, thereby promoting the idea of “sport for all”; **and professional/elite sport at the top** – sportsmen and sportswomen moving up from the base of the pyramid and boosting the profile of European competitions, which in turn generate public interest and revenues for reinvestment;
- b) **a values-based model** – grounded in the **specific nature** of sport, based on its fundamental social, educational and cultural values, which help deliver on European sports policy, contributes to regional development, fosters integration, tolerance, well-being and health, contributes to environmental protection, the fight against radicalisation, and social cohesion;
- c) **a financial solidarity scheme** – which allows, in addition to public funding, private revenues generated through events and activities at the elite level to be reinvested at the lower levels through development and education programmes for players, coaches, officials, equipment and infrastructure;
- d) **one federation per sport and per country** – playing a fundamental role in establishing rules and regulations, standards of sports facilities and equipment; ensuring the development of young athletes, education of referees, and an increase in grassroots participation; and managing competitions by coordinating the sports calendar and ensuring integrity and health and safety for all athletes, particularly as regards the manipulation of sports competitions and doping;
- e) **open competitions** – accessible through a promotion/relegation system which maintains a competitive balance and gives priority to sporting merit;
- f) **a structure based on voluntary activities** – the backbone of European sport, without which the whole sports movement in the vast majority of the EU Member States would cease to exist;
- g) **the legitimate autonomy of sport** – enabling sports organisations to pursue sporting objectives and take decisions to best suit the interests of the development, organisation and competitions of sport in a manner that – as much as possible – is not subject



to political influence. Such autonomy ensures the universality of sport, its values and its rules, as well as the integrity of sports competitions. However, this autonomy requires a high degree of good governance, transparency and accountability, and alignment with national and European legal frameworks.

A model endorsed by the European Union and internationally

European leaders and EU institutions have acknowledged the importance and added value of this European Sport Model on multiple occasions in the last 20 years. From 1998, with a first **Declaration on sport** annexed to the **Treaty of Amsterdam**, to the **Nice Declaration (2000)**, which emphasised the educational and cultural functions inherent in sport and the preservation of its social role, followed by the non-legally binding **“White Paper on Sport” (2007)**, in which the notion of the **specificity of sport** was first recognised, and the **Treaty of Lisbon (2009)**, which for the first time mentioned in a European treaty the important role played by sport in society.

Article 165 of the Treaty states that:

- *“The Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function.”*
- *And the Union shall aim to “developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and co-operation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen.”*

More recently, the social importance of sport was also affirmed by the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, which explicitly emphasised the role of sport in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the United Nations has since repeatedly reiterated this call to countries and recognised the autonomy of sport.

A model of significant importance which faces challenges

The modern Olympic Games were revived in Europe by a visionary European and founder of the IOC, Pierre de Coubertin. The Olympic ideal of developing sport to promote peace and understanding among nations and culture is intrinsically linked to the values at the heart of the European project.

Despite its importance, in a context of ever-growing globalisation and commercialisation, the European Sport Model is shaken by different challenges:

- the specificity of sport and its organisational structure have been recognised at European level on various occasions, but no clear framework has been established by European institutions. This has often resulted in a case-by-case approach, and to a restrictive application of the concept of specificity.
- commercial sports companies present new and innovative ways of sport in formats that appeal to young people and attests to the ever-growing relevance of sport in society. This innovation, the new formats and indeed the commercialisation of sport can (and has) brought benefits to European sport. However, these companies operate a for-profit business model, which is not at all comparable to the values-based, not-for-profit model, with solidarity-based funding principles, under which the IOC and other sports federations operate to deliver sport in Europe and across the world.
- Applying a purely commercial, market-based approach (as one might apply to a for-profit commercial organisation) is not appropriate for the regulation and organisation of sport under the European Model of Sport. To do so jeopardises the European Sport Model, which is based on values and solidarity.

If funds and investments do not trickle down to grassroots and community sport, sport cannot play its societal role:

- opportunities for everyday people to get involved through sport by using affordable sport infrastructure will diminish dramatically;
- identifying and training the next generation of elite athletes becomes challenging;
- sport cannot contribute to the achievement of the EU economic¹ and social agendas cannot materialise;
- the legitimate autonomy of sport, a fundamental principle for which EU institutions and the international community have been repeatedly recognizing, is threatened;
- public authorities would be compelled to take over and financially compensate the ongoing activities of millions of volunteers to carry out public policies in those different areas;
- considering and organising major sporting events in Europe, such as the Paris and Milano Cortina Olympic Games in 2024 and 2026 from a purely commercial, market-based perspective would mean losing sight of their long-term positive impact on two key European cities and regions, sport, infrastructure, culture, the European policy agenda and the benefits for European citizens.

¹ Sport's social significance to society all over Europe goes hand-in-hand with its economic contribution, with a share in national economies that is comparable to agriculture, forestry and fisheries combined and which equals 2.12 per cent of total GDP in the EU and over, 5.67 million employment opportunities.