

**Play the Game 2017
Riding waves of change 26-30 November 2017
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« Investing in ethical and safe sport: the international perspective »

Dear Participants,

Dear Colleagues,

This conference is about riding waves. Waves provoked by social, political, cultural or technological change. Waves that affect sport, positively or negatively. Because, even if at times we may get this impression, Sport does not evolve in a parallel world. Sport influences society, as society influences sport.

As you know, waves may be provoked by the wind, by earthquakes or by the gravitational pull of the sun and the moon. The question I want to address is the following: how can sport benefit from the wind, prepare for the earthquake and take advantage of the tides? My answer is very simple: by investing in ethics and safety.

Let me start by sport and ethics

The rapid commercialisation of sport over the last decades has largely outpaced the organisational development of sport, and is providing opportunities for criminals to exploit sport. Embezzlement, bribery, bidding processes accused of corruption, manipulation of competitions, doping... They are all criminal activities threatening sports' integrity. And, when unveiled, they also erode people's trust in the sport they love. I am worried they erode citizen's trust into institutions. The waves might gradually create small and big cracks in the solid fundamentals of the rule of law, and jeopardize entire edifice.

The Council of Europe envisions a continent built upon three pillars: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Our work in the field of sport pursues this mission too. Our anti-doping Convention and our Convention on the manipulation of sports competitions are strong legal instruments, strong currents moving in the right direction. 47 governments agreed on the standards, legal language and common level of commitment, and this is the core strength of our conventions. As you know, these conventions are made in Europe but not meant for Europe only. We are privileged to also work with and support the efforts of global organisations (such as WADA, UNESCO and the IOC) and countries in other continents. And this convening power, ability to codify political consensus of many stake holders into legal norms is an enormous strength of the CoE.

The Council of Europe's Anti-Doping Convention, the first international legally binding agreement in this area, paved the way towards the creation of the World Anti-Doping Agency and the adoption of the UNESCO Convention. Today, we have a two-pronged strategy: enhancing monitoring of compliance by state parties and providing targeted assistance to those countries that want to improve anti-doping policy and practice. For instance, we are running a project launched in May 2016 to enhance anti-doping policies in the Russian Federation. We also facilitate the coordination of public authorities' positions in the framework of WADA.

The Macolin Convention on match fixing is already making a difference, without even having entered into force yet. But I am worried about the current deadlock that prevents EU member States from ratifying it. I trust that Malta's position will evolve and that the EU institutions will find a way so that we can soon have a very strong common front in the fight against corruption and fraud. I am convinced that this is in everyone's interest.

Of course, good governance is the backbone of any institution and organisation wishing to be credible, effective and safe from corruption – sports organisation are by no means excluded from this logic. Governments have expressed their wish to see good governance principles at work in the sport sector. Such is also the expectation of athletes, sports lovers and citizens in general. More and more clubs and federations are introducing measures to improve transparency, participation and accountability. This evolution is very much needed and welcome. There is a momentum to be seized. But we need to speed up!

The Council of Europe contributes to this effort at different levels: at the political level, through the elaboration of a resolution on the promotion of good governance for adoption by the Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport in October 2018, and through our participation in the International Partnership against Corruption in Sport, with sport organisations and governments, to develop common benchmarks on good governance; and at a more practical level, through the preparation of a handbook providing examples, ideas and advice on national good governance practices and the setting up of a database on corruption cases in sport. And, of course, we also support the Sport Governance Observer project of Play the Game, to extend the benefits of this project to other interested European countries.

Turning to another important issue: Safety in sport

Protecting the rights of people in the context of sport is also part of our mission. This includes making sport a safe environment for both adults and children when practicing sport or attending a match. The new Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events has just entered into force. Through this convention, we look to guarantee the safety of thousands of people at a time!

Let me give you an example: safety, security and service preparations for UEFA EURO 2020 will be a major challenge. This will be the first time that such an event takes place in 13 hosting cities from 12 countries across Europe, from Dublin to Baku. This obviously calls for stronger cooperation and communication amongst all concerned stakeholders. For this reason, at the Council of Europe, a working group on the preparation of UEFA EURO 2020 is already looking into how to address the key challenges.

Accidents in major sports events are immediately visible. But unfortunately, there are other dramatic events in sport that are seldom, or never, reported. There are many victims of violence in sport that will never be known, healed, compensated. I am speaking about sexual abuse of children at the hands of people they trust, such as their coaches, their sport leaders or their peers. According to available estimates, around 1 in 5 children in Europe are victims of some form of sexual violence. The practice of sport is not immune from this risk. But we can work together to prevent it and to better respond when it occurs. I warmly welcome your decision to tackle this sensitive and important issue at this conference.

The Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention), which now binds 42 countries in Europe, requires States to take very important measures to prevent and respond to sexual abuse. They include, for instance, the screening of professionals working with children (to make sure that they have no criminal records for sexual offences), professionals' training, or the setting up of safe and accessible reporting mechanisms so that victims or other people can report abuse.

Following the many scandals unveiling serial sexual abuse in sport EPAS, the Council of Europe inclusive platform for co-operation between public authorities and sports organisations, decided in 2017 to address this issue through a Joint Project with the EU. On the basis of standards, training and campaigning tools produced by the Council of Europe on the protection of Children in Sport, we will very soon launch "Start to talk", an initiative aiming at empowering sport organisations as well as governmental authorities in the prevention and response to every kind of abuse, including sexual abuses in sport. Those who join the call will commit to take concrete steps to keep children and sport safe from abuse. I trust you will join the call as well.

Dear participants, dear colleagues and friends,

Let me conclude by thanking Play the Game for bringing us together to discuss, in an open and friendly environment, issues that are far from simple. When facing all these waves, we may disagree on the approaches and the speed. But we must always keep in mind our shared objective, persistently staying the course and making sure that disagreements do not let us stranded.

Many thanks for your attention