



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

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President

**Keynote speech for the European Commission high-level conference
“The recovery of the sport sector after the COVID-19 crisis: the way ahead”**

The fact that I can only greet you virtually is itself a reflection of the unprecedented situation we all are facing because of the global coronavirus crisis.

I would like to thank Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, for inviting me to be a part of this discussion on the recovery of the sport sector in Europe after the COVID-19 crisis.

While the crisis is far from over, we can see already now that sport is widely recognised as an essential factor in fighting the pandemic and as an integral part of the solution for the crisis recovery.

We are all still learning every day. But I hope very much that the first lesson from this crisis, we have already learned. And that lesson is: we need more solidarity. Solidarity within societies and solidarity among societies.

Solidarity is at the heart of the Olympic Games which unite the world in all its diversity. In these difficult times, we need the Olympic values more than ever.

With these values, sport is ready to contribute to rebuild a more human-centred and inclusive society.

Sport and physical activity contribute directly to physical and mental health and to combat non-communicable diseases.

Sport can save lives. We have seen this over the last few months, in particular in times of lockdown, social distancing and uncertainty. This is why the recent “StayStrong, StayActive, StayHealthy” campaign of the IOC resonated so strongly, with half a billion people being introduced in a single day to this campaign through the world’s biggest digital Olympic workout.

This contribution of sport to public health has been acknowledged among many others by the World Health Organization. In the midst of the pandemic, the WHO signed a cooperation agreement with the IOC to promote a healthy society through sport.



Sport has a great social significance by being the glue which bonds communities together. Sport promotes inclusive societies, because all too often sport is the only activity that unites people regardless of their social, political, religious or cultural background. Such inclusivity is even more important in otherwise deeply divided societies.

Sport plays a significant economic role, it creates jobs, generating business activity. In Europe, for example, research shows that sport contributes more than two percent to GDP, a contribution which makes sport economically more important than a number of more traditional economic sectors.

Commissioner Gabriel, you summarised this contribution of sport in an excellent way when you said: “The coronavirus crisis has highlighted the importance of sport for our societies, promoting not only the physical activity and well-being of EU citizens, but also contributing to Europe’s economic development and social inclusion, as well as to major societal challenges.”

For all these reasons, the IOC calls on the governments of the world to include sport in their post-corona support programmes.

This call was also echoed by Sport Ministers of the 27 EU Member States.

Furthermore, 118 UN Member States also recently called for sport and physical activity to be included in their recovery plans and in their national strategies for sustainable development.

The European Commission has also taken action to make its COVID-19 related resources available to EU Member States to support the sport sector. I would like to thank Commissioner Gabriel for your personal commitment in this regard.

Sport can only make this contribution to society if the values and solidarity-based model of sport is supported by the public authorities. This is why we need to strengthen the European Sport Model, its values and its robust solidarity funding mechanisms.

The European Sports Model is something that we Europeans can rightly be proud of.

It is a uniquely European approach to organised sports, reflecting the values of solidarity, of inclusion, and of peace.

This European Sport Model reflects the specific organisation of sport in Europe and its fundamental social and educational function. This unique model is built on solidarity and volunteers. It is based on the twin principles of financial solidarity, which allows revenues



generated through events and activities at the elite level to be reinvested at the lower level, and of openness of competition, which gives priority to sporting merit.

It is an approach that fully resonates with the social mission of the IOC of making the world a better place through sport. This is why the IOC redistributes 90 per cent of its revenue for the benefit of the athletes and for the development of sport worldwide, from the grassroots to the elite level. In hard figures, this means 5 billion US dollars in the four years of this Olympiad. Our money goes to the Olympic teams consisting of the athletes, that means the National Olympic Committees, who in turn support their national athletes and promote sport for all in communities across their countries; and it goes to the International Federations to support the athletes and the development of their sport.

In other words, we are also funding grassroots and volunteer structures which is the foundation of the European Sports Model.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis, the IOC has actively supported the athletes, the NOCs and the IFs through an additional aid package programme of around 100 million US dollars. The Olympic Movement is facing an unprecedented challenge of organising postponed Olympic Games for the first time, while also helping our stakeholders during this time of crisis. Many NOCs and IFs were and are facing significant financial hardship from the crisis. It is no exaggeration to say that through our financial support, we saved many IFs whose very existence was on the brink.

We also supported more than 1,600 athletes with Tokyo 2020 Olympic scholarships, allowing them to continue their preparations for these postponed Olympic Games next year.

In these difficult times, the values-driven European Sport Model can make a significant contribution to the recovery by mobilising volunteers and by promoting more solidarity within communities, among countries and also among popular and less popular sports.

Without solidarity, clubs and associations at the base of the European Sport Model cannot survive and the huge contribution they make to their communities and to elite sport will be lost.

The coronavirus crisis has made it very clear: a strong European Sport Model is key to enable public authorities to deliver on their economic and social policy agenda in a post-coronavirus world.



But unfortunately, we have to realise that this European Sport Model is under threat today. In fact, the very existence of the values-, solidarity-, and volunteer-based model is under threat not only in Europe but around the world. It is challenged by a purely profit-driven approach that ignores the intrinsic values and social mission of sport. It is under threat because the social mission of sport organisations is losing ground to the purely profit-oriented goals of commercial sport providers.

This situation is not a zero-sum game. Values-driven sport organisations like us can certainly co-exist with commercial sport companies. They are bringing fresh ideas and inspire us how sport can be presented in new and innovative ways, appealing to youth and all generations. We welcome this. And it is only fair that they make a profit.

But what is not fair is that public authorities around the world are ignoring the fundamental differences between these purely commercial companies and us, as values-driven sport organisations. Applying a purely market-based approach to sport seriously jeopardizes the values-based system as we know it. It neglects the social contribution of organised sport and its existing solidarity mechanisms. By only applying market rules, a sport organisation would be treated like a regular for-profit business, like a steel manufacturer or an agricultural commodity producer.

It is my sincere hope that the public authorities, in particular in Europe, do not lose sight of the important social role of sport by equating it with commercial sports business. If everything is only looked at from a business perspective, if only the economic rules are applied to measure the impact of sport on society, then the social mission of sport is lost.

Sport is about so much more than business. For us in the Olympic Movement, money is not an end in itself. Money is just a means to achieve our mission. This mission is: to put sport at the service of society and to make the world a better place through sport.

In this respect, it is undeniable that the health, social and economic contribution of sport is an essential factor in fighting the pandemic and in the crisis recovery.

This coronavirus crisis is already changing our world. Nobody should even dream of getting back to the way things were before the crisis. Even once we have finally overcome the health crisis, we will still face the far-reaching social, financial, economic and political consequences.



This new world will need sport and its values. This is why the IOC is fully committed to continuing to promote the role of values-based sport in society.

Thanks to the stability that we enjoy, we do so not only with words, but with actions. Therefore, we will even strengthen our solidarity model, which benefits not just a few countries, or a few sports. It benefits all the athletes from all 206 NOCs, from the IOC Refugee Olympic Team and from all Olympic sports, whether popular or less popular, thereby demonstrating our commitment to solidarity.

We can do this thanks to the stability we enjoy, having secured Olympic Games hosts until 2028, and thanks to the loyalty and trust our commercial partners are demonstrating. For these reasons, we can even envisage increasing the Olympic Solidarity budget.

Beyond this solidarity aspect, the crisis has made it clearer than ever that sport is the low-cost, high-impact tool par excellence for all countries in their recovery efforts. In the post-corona virus world, where existing fault lines and inequities are likely to deepen further, the unifying power of sport will have an even more significant role to play.

While sport is contributing significantly already, delivering on the priorities of the European Commission requires unprecedented collective action from everyone. The sport community is ready to be a meaningful partner in this European effort, in particular with regard to the next EU Work Plan for Sport.

At least in some countries, this crisis has also accelerated the trend of diminishing trust in institutions and organisations. This also affects the IOC as a civil, non-governmental organisation. We know that our ability to make a difference in the world rests on our credibility and integrity. For this reason, good governance is a central feature of Olympic Agenda 2020, our reform programme for the Olympic Movement. The IOC, as a values-based organisation, has the double-duty to uphold good governance and integrity in everything we do. This is why, through the Olympic Agenda 2020 reforms, we have turned the page and put in place a robust system of governance and transparency. We have established advanced control and risk management processes. Our accounts are audited at a much higher standard than legally required.

We publish an annual report where we make all our flows of money transparent. We have strong rules in place to prevent misconduct as well as to swiftly sanction such behaviour. We



are monitored by a well-respected Ethics Commission. We are honoured that this IOC Ethics Commission is chaired by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Good governance is an area where we can build on ongoing cooperation. The EU Commission has already financed a number of good governance projects of the Olympic Movement. The IOC has contributed to several EU expert groups on this topic. We very much welcome this dialogue and strongly believe that both sides can benefit greatly by even deepening our cooperation.

The reason I cannot join you live for this conference is because I am in Tokyo at the moment. We are working at full speed with our Japanese partners and friends to make the postponed Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 a great demonstration of solidarity.

Together with the Japanese government, the Organising Committee and many more, we are preparing for all 206 NOCs to come together in a safe environment in Tokyo next year, to give a signal of hope and resilience to all humankind. In this way, the Olympic flame can be the light at the end of the dark tunnel that we are currently in.

Very soon, we will celebrate this great Olympic spirit in Europe again. In four years, Paris will host the Olympic Games and, two years after that, Milano-Cortina will host the Olympic Winter Games. With the Olympic Games Paris 2024, we are going back to our roots and to the home country of our founder Pierre de Coubertin.

Coubertin knew of the central importance of values for sport. He once said: "Sport without values is only a military parade". For once, I will dare to add to the words of my predecessor by saying that today sport without values is just entertainment business.

In this Olympic spirit, I wish you a fruitful discussion as you chart the way ahead.