



International
Olympic
Committee

The President

Keynote speech for the EU Sport Forum 2021

'Towards a healthier, resilient and sustainable European sport'

Madam Commissioner,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to first thank Commissioner Mariya Gabriel for inviting me to be a part of this year's EU Sport Forum.

The coronavirus pandemic has changed our world in fundamental ways. Even once we have finally overcome the health crisis, we will face its far-reaching social, financial, economic and political consequences.

We know that sport contributes greatly to the physical and mental health. But the importance of sport goes beyond health. Sport has a great social significance by being the glue which bonds communities together. Sport has a great economic significance by creating jobs and generating an important contribution to GDP. This essential role of sport has been recognised by many in the international community, from the EU to the United Nations, and many others.

This is why sport must prepare for this new world and be ready to contribute to rebuild a more human-centred and inclusive society.

In order to address the challenges of the future, we need a vision of how this new post-crisis world will look like. For this reason, the IOC has recently adopted a new strategic roadmap called Olympic Agenda 2020+5.

This new roadmap emphasises one important lesson that I hope we all have already learned from the crisis: We need more solidarity. More solidarity within societies and more solidarity among societies.

One of the challenges we can only address in solidarity is the climate crisis. The IOC therefore is ambitious also in this regard.

Our IOC Sustainability Strategy is a holistic approach that comprises our three spheres of responsibility: the IOC as an organisation; the IOC as the owner of the Olympic Games; the IOC as the leader of the Olympic Movement.

With regards to the IOC as an organisation, Olympic House, our home in Lausanne, certified as one of the most sustainable buildings in the world, is testimony to our sustainability commitment.

Today, we are already a carbon-neutral organisation. And we are committed to becoming a climate-positive organisation by 2024.

The Olympic Forest project is an illustration of how we are becoming climate-positive. The Olympic Forest will cover more than 2,000 hectares in Senegal and Mali, where we will plant more than 350,000 trees. In this way, we are contributing, in collaboration with the UN, to the Great Green Wall project in Africa.

All upcoming editions of the Olympic Games are already committed to be carbon-neutral. Furthermore, we will require all Olympic Games to be climate-positive at the latest from 2030 onwards.

With regards to the Olympic Movement, the IOC will continue to support International Sports Federations and National Olympic Committees in their transition towards carbon neutrality. The UN Sport for Climate Action Framework plays a central role in this respect and includes 100 EU-based organisations among its over 200 signatories.

Another challenge we can only address in solidarity is the global refugee crisis.

This is why in 2015, we created the IOC Refugee Olympic Team for the Olympic Games Rio 2016. We created an opportunity for refugee athletes, and we sent a signal of hope to all the too many refugees in the world. In doing so, we raised the worldwide awareness about the magnitude of this crisis. Unfortunately, the reasons why we created this team still persist. Therefore, we decided to once again have an IOC Refugee Olympic Team for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. In fact, the team composition will be announced later today. Their participation in Tokyo will once again send the clear message that refugees are our fellow human beings – that they are an enrichment to society, just as they are an enrichment to our Olympic community.

Another example of how we are contributing to a more inclusive society is our commitment to gender equality. Gender equality is not just an issue of fairness. Gender equality is part of good governance of any organisation.

We are pursuing gender equality with full engagement. For the Olympic Games, we can proudly say: we made it. At the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, we will achieve gender equality for the first time in history with almost 49 per cent women participating.

Going one step further, gender parity will be achieved at the Olympic Games Paris 2024, when we will have the same number of male and female events and the same number of male and female athletes.

With regard to promoting women in leadership positions within sport organisations, we are not there yet. But we are making good progress. Thanks to our reforms, we increased the percentage of female IOC Members from 21 to 38 per cent since 2013. On the IOC Executive Board, female representation has grown from 27 per cent to 33 per cent during the same time, while female membership in IOC Commissions grew from 20 to 48 per cent.

Solidarity is essential for achieving these goals. This is what links sport to the values at the heart of the European project.

Sport can only make this contribution to society if the values and solidarity-based model of sport are 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 values-driven European Sport Model can make a significant contribution to the post-crisis recovery by mobilising volunteers and by promoting more solidarity within communities and among countries.

The discussions which will be held in this regard during the upcoming Slovenian EU Presidency will be a key opportunity to safeguard this model and also deepen our existing cooperation, in particular with regard to the EU Work Plan for Sport and other important initiatives like the European Climate Pact and the EU High Level Group on Gender Equality.

The post-coronavirus world will need sport and its values. And it will need more solidarity. Because there is no peace without solidarity. So let us join hands, to work towards a healthier, resilient and sustainable future in Europe and beyond.

In this Olympic spirit, I wish you fruitful discussions and a successful forum.