



## THE SPORT AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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### 1. The Council of Europe: brief historical overview

The Council of Europe (hereafter CoE) was founded on 5 May 1949 as the first European political institution. This inter-governmental organisation was set up to promote peace and co-operation in Europe, and its mandate was based on three core values: Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law. It has 47 member States embracing 800 million Europeans, from Reykjavik to Baku and from Moscow to Lisbon<sup>1</sup>.

The organisation adopts standards. The most important and famous Convention is the European Human Rights Convention; however some 200 treaties and more than a thousand recommendations have been adopted under its auspices. The CoE does not consider that adopted standards alone suffice, and thus also pays attention to their implementation. To that end, monitoring mechanisms have been set up, covering on-site visits, consultative visits of experts, surveys, hearings, etc. Last but not least, the CoE provides its members with assistance on how to comply more adequately with the adopted standards (through training events, seminars, publications, etc.)

### 2. The Council of Europe and Sport

In the field of sport, the Council of Europe has followed the same methodology with a view to maintaining the integrity and virtues of sport : through two conventions, it seek to protect sport against the dangers on anti-doping and on spectator violence, and on the other hand it promotes “Sport for All” as a means of improving the quality of life, facilitating social integration, and contributing to social cohesion. The European Sports Charter, which was first adopted in 1975, provides the framework for the sport policy to which every European country must subscribe. Article 1 of the Charter proclaims that “everyone has the right to practice sport”. This is the fundamental message, the philosophy underlying all of the Council of Europe’s work in the field of sport.

Since 2007, a new body has been set up by the Council of Europe to give new momentum to pan-European sports co-operation: the Enlarged Partial

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<sup>1</sup> The Council of Europe should not be confused with the European Union. These are two different organisations. However, the twenty-seven members of the European Union are all members of the Council of Europe.

Agreement on Sport (EPAS). The aim of EPAS is to promote sport and emphasise its positive values through policy and standard setting, monitoring, capacity building, and the exchange of good practice. EPAS provides a platform for intergovernmental sports co-operation between the public authorities of the member states<sup>2</sup> and between authorities and the sport movement<sup>3</sup>.

One of the main priorities of EPAS is its programme to promote diversity and fight against discrimination in and through sport<sup>4</sup>. Although EPAS activities are mainly related to the social inclusion of people with disabilities *through* sport, it also addresses the promotion of diversity *in* sport. I will therefore present how the Council of Europe tackled the issue of the social inclusion of people with disabilities through sport, and later focus more precisely on the issue of inclusion of people with disabilities in sport.

### **3. The role of public authorities to ensure that people with disabilities can practice sport**

Estimates indicate that almost one person out of ten – i.e. 80 000 000 - suffers from some type of deficiency, incapacity or disability in the Council of Europe's member states. The CoE was therefore committed to accepting the position and to improving the circumstances as well as to creating a supportive environment for these citizens. It is important to note that the CoE's policies have always been based on the assumption that people with disabilities make an important and enriching contribution to society.

Experience has shown that sport has on the one hand had an impact on the participation of people with disabilities and on their rehabilitation on the other. Sports activities play indeed a vital role in promoting social integration, particularly among young people.

Sport opens up real prospects for participation in society, for it enables individuals, whether they have disabilities or not, to communicate, to experience togetherness and to find out what they are capable of doing. In addition, sport encourages people to make efforts and enhances their competitive spirit; it prevents them from withdrawing into themselves and becoming isolated.

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<sup>2</sup> Currently EPAS has 34 member states, and is continuously seeking new members.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, through the unique and important feature of the Consultative Committee, the sports NGOs are able to participate in the processes of drafting European norms and determining the EPAS programme of activities. Through the Consultative Committee EPAS encourages dialogue between public authorities, sports federations and NGOs.

<sup>4</sup> The objective of the programme is to organise an international conference every year on different target groups. In 2009, the focus has been the fight against racism in sport, in 2010 on people with disability access to sport and the next conference is planned to have women in sport as the focus area. Following the conference various follow-up measures such as training, awareness raising activities and even legislative initiatives may take place. All steps in a programme cycle cannot be passed in one year, and a long-term focus is required

Sports activities can therefore be an essential part of the rehabilitation of people with disabilities as they improve their physical and mental well-being by increasing their motivation, helping them to get to know themselves better and improving their social skills and physical condition. Sport helps keep people well and in shape. It is a powerful means of fighting the limits imposed by illness or accidents.

From the standpoint of fundamental ethics and the respect owed to each individual, the promotion and fostering of sports and physical leisure-time activities for all people with disabilities, helps to improve the quality of their lives and contributes to their social rehabilitation. While sport is not the answer to all societal ills, it can play a significant role in preventing marginalisation and can be an effective way of achieving social cohesion across the whole spectrum of society, not only among young people.

The normative work developed by the Council of Europe, including in the field of sport, is mostly directed to the governments of member States of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe policies concerning people with disabilities date back to 1959. The legal instruments adopted since then are evidence of the importance the Council of Europe attaches to this sphere of activities. As regards sports, the Council of Europe began to generally address these issues until the end of the 1960s. The texts that are of major importance in integrating people with disabilities through sport are:

- The European Sports Charter, which was adopted in 1976<sup>5</sup>, revised in 92 and in 2001 - No. R (92) 13, which underlines the right of everyone to participate in sport and insists that sport be kept free of any kind of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, sex, political or social status (see in particular articles 1 and 4)
- Recommendation R (86) 18 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Charter on Sport for All: People with disabilities.
- Recommendation No. R (95) 17 on the significance of sport for society, which relates to the place of sport in social development;
- Texts adopted by the Recommendation No. R (96) 16 of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, on sport and local authorities, and the 1993 European Urban Charter<sup>6</sup>;
- Recommendation Rec (2006) 5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015.

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<sup>5</sup> See also [Resolution on Sport for the Handicapped and other Health Impaired Groups](#) (84/7), [Resolution on Sport for Handicapped Persons](#) (81/5).

<sup>6</sup> “sport provides the means of interaction for individuals and communities, bringing them closer together. It can help, particularly with young people, in giving them a sense of direction and avoid social alienation. It can help in the fight against drug abuse and exclusion”

In the above-mentioned texts, recommendations have been put forward to the governments of Council of Europe member states, as well as to local and regional authorities.

1. The Recommendation adopted by the Committee of Ministers "*The European Charter for Sport for All: people with disabilities*" (R (86) 18) underlines that governments should, among others things, "take the necessary steps to ensure that all relevant public authorities and private organisations are aware of the sporting and recreational wants and needs, including in education, of all people with disabilities - not only those who are physically or sensorially disabled and mentally handicapped, but also those who suffer from an organic or psychosomatic disorder". A set of specific measures is recommended to increase the accessibility of public sport facilities (guidelines are set down in the appendix to this recommendation). Co-operation between the various public authorities involved in sport for people with disabilities, such as health, social welfare, education and sports departments should be fostered, in particular regarding their policies and actions. The interests and views of people with disabilities should also be given due consideration in the development of sport policies.

In addition, governments of member states should encourage and work closely with the sports organisations concerned, encouraging people with disabilities to contribute directly to the framing of sports policies which concern them and that their sporting interests are taken into due account in policy-making and decisions. A specific alinea refers finally to the elite sport.

2. Building upon the principles of the "European Sport for All Charter", the *European Sport Charter* was adopted in 1992 and revised in 2001 to provide a common set of principles throughout Europe. In these documents, governments have committed themselves to providing their citizens with opportunities to practice sport under well-defined conditions. Sport must be accessible to everybody, healthy and safe, fair and tolerant, building on high ethical values, capable of fostering personal self-fulfilment at all levels, respectful of the environment and protective of human dignity (see article 4).

3. In its *Recommendation No. R (95) 17 on the significance of sport for society*, the Committee of Ministers points out that sport is part and parcel of society and therefore a key factor in public policy-making, particularly in the social, economic and health fields. It recommends that, in conjunction with the competent public authorities and autonomous sports associations, the governments of member states should frame national policies and strategies in accordance with the European Sports Charter. These policies should foster the development of sport, encourage people of all ages to take up a regular physical activity and reinforce sport as a factor in social development.

4. The 1993 *European Urban Charter* requests local authorities to improve access to sport and sports facilities for all people, irrespective of social background, economic situation and income, age, or ethnic group. Where people with disabilities are concerned, it is necessary to remove the psychological, social, economic and physical constraints which presently prevent many urban dwellers from taking part in sport.

5. According to *Recommendation Rec(2006)5* of the Committee of Ministers, member states should urge public institutions and encourage private institutions, relevant bodies and providers to actively engage all people with disabilities in their cultural, leisure, sporting, spiritual and intellectual activities; encourage institutions and relevant bodies dealing with culture, sports, leisure and tourism to undertake regular disability awareness training for their staff as a mainstream activity, and enable people with disabilities to enjoy access to culture, sports, tourism and leisure activities by, for example, encouraging providers to make their premises and services accessible through whatever means are necessary. People with disabilities can participate in these activities, both as observers and as actors.

Sports activities for people with disabilities should therefore be extended and their further development encouraged by appropriate public relations methods, the training of staff, the planning of sports centres and the promotion of associations concerned with sporting activities.

The Committee of Ministers therefore recommends that member states' governments:

- adapt sports amenities and facilitate access and transport to these amenities and recreation areas, as suggested in Recommendation No. R (86) 18 on the European Charter for Sport for All: people with disabilities;
- set up projects designed for the disabled to give them confidence in their own physical abilities, together with programmes which make them aware of the potential physical, psychological and social benefits of sport;
- encourage mainstream sporting bodies to make provision for, and contact with, sporting bodies for people with disabilities and to take measures to eliminate the distinction between disabled and mainstream sport in order to provide acceptance and integration for the disabled in the world of sport.

#### **4. The role of sport movement to ensure that people with disabilities can practice sport**

The above mentioned recommendations are also addressed to the sport movement and in the view of the Council of Europe, all stakeholders share responsibility and should work together to improve the situation.

The European Sport Charter, which has laid down stable parameters within which sports policies can develop as well as a common framework and basic principles for national sports policies, strike the necessary balance between governmental and non-governmental action ensuring that their responsibilities are complementary (see article 3 of the Charter).

In the 1986 Recommendation “European Charter on Sport for All: Disabled Persons”, Part A of the recommendation is directed to the “The governments of member states”<sup>7</sup>, whereas Part B refers to “The governments of member states should encourage and work closely with the sports organisations concerned” in order to fulfil a certain number obligations.

However, the Council of Europe, and more particularly EPAS work in relation to adapted sport and more generally to the inclusion of people with disability in sport should also be read in conjunction with the recently adopted Recommendation on the principle of autonomy of sport in Europe<sup>8</sup>. In that context, the Council of Europe stresses

“its belief that in order to offer the public access to sporting activities and hence to create the collective benefits expected from sport (in fields such as public health, education and social integration), the sport movement is in principle better placed to organise itself within its own autonomous structures”.

In the field of integration in sport of people with disabilities, several model have been chosen by different organisations and this conference illustrates the diversity of models of governance. Sport Federations, the Paralympic movement, sport NGOs have developed a model that corresponds to the identified needs of their members and in line with the reality of the movement in one country or at international level (see contributions made by CoE experts in the conference + ref to Warsaw) ....<sup>9</sup>.

The Council of Europe won't interfere in the model chosen by a Federation. It will “only” make sure that the Federation in question do applies the principles laid down in different texts, such as the European Sport Charter. Consultative visits are carried out by the EPAS to analyse sport policies in a specific country. During this visits, meetings are organised both with public authorities and with the sport movement. Recently, a delegation of experts visited Bosnia and Herzegovina and discussions were held on adapted sport and access to sport facilities for people with disabilities (report not available yet).

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<sup>7</sup> [Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States of the European Charter on Sport for All: Disabled Persons](#) (86/18) , [European Charter on Sport for All: disabled persons](#) (1986)

<sup>8</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the principle of autonomy of sport in Europe, adopted on 2 February 2011. See also Jean-Loup Chappelet, *The Autonomy of Sport in Europe*, 2010, Council of Europe Publishing, 108 p.

<sup>9</sup> Different models exist in the domestic settings of CoE Member states, e.g. the full integration of disabled athletes in all level of Norwegian sport, see the presentation made by Mads Andersen, Warsaw conference, website epas.

In addition, several organisations from the sport movement are members of the Consultative Committee of the EPAS. They have opted for different models (add full list : EPC, European Judo Union<sup>10</sup>, UEFA, etc..). Besides, the EPAS also associates/supports other organisations that might follow another approach when carrying out activities. Recently, a representative of International Wheelchair Basketball Federation took part in a conference, and a training session was organised in cooperation with Special Olympics. The aim of EPAS is to increase awareness on the need to open sport structures to people with disability and in that respect it tends to follow a comprehensive and inclusive approach. This is also true when supporting activities to use sport as a tool to favour the social inclusion of people with disabilities.

## **Conclusions**

Discriminating against people with disabilities in any way infringes their dignity and equality of rights and constitutes an impediment to individual participation and to equality of social, political, economic and cultural life. People with disabilities are “one of us” and that means we are prepared to take all requisite measures to ensure that they can participate fully in the life of the community.

It is therefore necessary to adopt an integrated policy approach, which essentially consists of combining measures in all fields that help to enhance the participation and independence of people with disabilities. Sport is one of the main fields in which this is possible.

To that end, the CoE has developed a comprehensive approach on the one hand in the field of sport through the EPAS, and in the field of integration of people with disabilities on the other hand through the Directorate General of Social Cohesion.

Progress has been achieved to some extent, but challenges lie ahead of us. Considering that several tens thousands Europeans are concerned, it is the duty of all stakeholders to pursue their effort and increase synergies between them all to the benefit of the whole society.

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<sup>10</sup> European Judo Union develops an adapted judo network, see for instance : <http://www.ifapa.biz/?q=node/275>