

Presidency summary of the discussion from the Informal Videoconference of the EU Ministers of Sport

The videoconference in the field of sport was organised by Croatian Presidency on 21 April 2020, as an opportunity for EU Ministers and their representatives, along with the Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, to meet virtually and discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the sport sector. Beside general protection measures to stem the spread of the coronavirus, it is more than evident there have also been visible quick reactions of the sport sector, which already contributed to the prevention of the spread of the virus in the early phase of the outbreak through various recommendations and measures.

Up until today, in most of the Member States all sport competitions and events have been either cancelled or postponed and sport facilities are mostly closed. However, there are specific examples of allowing certain sport trainings under specific conditions and depending on the epidemiological situation. These circumstances have a negative impact on possibilities for physical activity of citizens, who's outdoor movements are nowadays often limited or restricted.

The Ministers emphasised that, in these times of crisis, various problems are being experienced by athletes, coaches and other stakeholders in the sport sector. Different approaches and measures, both economic and social, are being undertaken to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. These often vary due to different stages of the pandemic or to differences in the organisation of national sport systems. There are numerous examples, such as financial support for employers and employees in the sport sector, rent subsidies, partial reimbursement of costs because of cancelled sport events, tax adjustments or postponement of financial obligations. The support is also visible in the flexibility linked to the implementation of the ongoing projects, as well as in the application process.

Except for the economic support, there are examples of cooperation with sport federations in adjusting regulations to organise the competition system and jointly resolve various problems. From the social perspective, examples of support for athletes and citizens have been highlighted with respect to maintaining physical activity via various campaigns, such as the European Commission Initiative #BeActiveAtHome, which is well accepted and implemented on a national level via similar manner by different Member States.

Ministers pointed out that during and after crisis period, it is necessary to continuously take into account safety and security as EU top priority. Exit strategies should include measures enabling training for both athletes and citizens, firstly for those who conduct outdoor activities, where social distancing can be maintained. Additionally, innovative approaches and digital tools should be further explored.

It is also necessary to jointly reflect upon future activities within the framework of the European Week of Sport. While developing efficient measures in the aftermath of the pandemic, research and analysis of the impacts of the crisis are more than welcome and seen as important cooperation point between European Commission and Member States. When agreeing on future priorities of new EU Work Plan for Sport, Member States should be aware of the consequences of the pandemic and take into account emergencies and investments to increase the resilience of the sport system.

Future measures should take into account principles and values of the European model of sport and should be intended for both professional and grassroots clubs and initiatives.

In a financial point of view, it is necessary to search for possibilities to reallocate the existing and planned national budgets as well as EU funds to support and encourage the sustainable development of sport. Ministers welcomed the flexibility of the Erasmus+: Sport programme, as well as other programmes, alongside with all the activities already undertaken by the European Commission. It is also important to explore options within new initiatives such as the “Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative” and the “Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)”, in line with national priorities and in cooperation with relevant institutions. It should be also ensured that sport is recognised as an important part of regional development and policies.

The Presidency concluded the meeting by stressing the importance of a wide cross-sectoral cooperation through further exchange of information and best practice; including cooperation and the dialogue with the sports movement. All this will help joint work on exit strategies.