**Athens, 19/10/2020**

**MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS**

**GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF SPORTS**

**GENERAL MANAGEMENT OF SPORTS ORGANIZATION**

**SPORT MANAGEMENT FOR ALL, PROVISION,**

**DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT SPORT**

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**SUBJECT:** **UN Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events and Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to prevent Violent Extremism**.

Following the e-mail from 12/10/2020 of the Head of the Directorate of Sport for All, Promotion, Sports Development, Scientific Support & International Relations Mr. Georgios Pigos, requesting our contribution regarding policies and best practices that will strengthen the power of UN Member States in the areas of countering terrorism and violent extremism, from our post as designated focal points of the General Secretariat for Sport in the United Nations Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events and Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to prevent Violent Extremism, kindly note the following:

The protection and security of major sporting events and the prevention of violent extremism can become a reality by making full use of the values and benefits of sport. Besides, its power is closely linked to its ability to break through the "walls" that divide people, whether they are racial, national, religious or cultural. The objectives of combating racism, xenophobia and of cultivating acceptance of diversity are made easier and more effective with its help.

The following policies or practices can be used, or have already been used in Greece towards that direction:

**Role model athlete**

Athletes have the power to act as role models and the impact would be stronger if they held an important position in the hierarchy with relative responsibility, so that they could influence sport in a more targeted way, especially young people. As an example, we can cite the current Secretary General for Sports of Greece, Mr George Mavrotas, former water polo player who participated in five Olympic Games (1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000), four Word Championships (1986, 1990, 1994, 1998), as well as in several European Championships.

Besides, role model athletes can send a powerful anti-racism message and support human rights. Athletes from vulnerable, weak, or marginalised social groups, who have been successful and are recognisable by the general public, can be significantly helpful in developing a culture of acceptance of diversity. One such example is that of athlete Giannis Antetokounmpo, a Greek professional basketball player of international level and of Nigerian origin, who has managed to overcome social exclusion that often affects athletes of colour.

**Protection shield against radicalisation of children and young people**

Sport helps children and adolescents all over the world to build their personality and mental balance and to develop self-esteem. It gives them the right tools to resist terrorist propaganda. The opportunity for children and young people to be able to use big stadia where important events take place, training grounds and venues, as well as locker rooms of their idol athletes, can help to create a sense of closeness and connection to them. In this way, the young athlete feels confident that he can succeed, set goals for the future, and that he can reach new heights.

Besides, in order to gain the trust of children from "difficult" backgrounds such as ghettos, before they are radicalised by terrorist groups, and before becoming dependent on the internet through which they are often recruited by radical and extremist groups, as well as in order to enable them to cultivate the feeling of belonging and that there are safe opportunities to be seized, one must realise, the sooner the better, that those objectives can be achieved via sport. On the other hand, society itself tends to treat young athletes more positively, ignoring discrimination and accepting diversity, which proves the coherent action of the sport. Sports for All Programs sponsored by the General Secretariat of Sports, offer children and young people opportunities to participate in sports activities at low cost or even for free.

The great diversity and multiplicity that exist among youth groups and the need to take this factor into account, to prevent and address the problem of violent extremism, should be emphasised. In this context, training coaches to detect signs that indicate an athlete's radicalisation (clothing, tattoos, musical preferences, etc.) is considered necessary. Furthermore, the creation of mixed groups (boys and girls), of different ideologies, etc. helps to accept diversity and avoid marginalisation.

**The assistance of International and National Sports Organizations**

Major sporting events must be linked to social inclusion programmes. Practices such as the International Olympic Committee Refugee Olympic Team, can be associated with the selection of a refugee as a Torchbearer by the Hellenic Olympic Committee in the Olympic Torch Relay at the Open Reception Centre in Eleonas (Athens) as well as the supply of sports equipment by the Hellenic Olympic Committee in the Open Reception Centres of Eleonas and Moria (Mytilene island, Greece). These practices cultivate the spirit of solidarity as well as a positive attitude towards the social integration of refugees and other vulnerable social groups in society.

The action of the Sports Federations, that have the power and obligation to promote clean sport and its values, can also play a key role but it is important that they also protect athletes and motivate them to adopt good practices. Ensuring the integrity of sport is extremely important and strongly related with the role of federations.

**The role of National Governmental Organisations**

Extremism and radicalization have political implications, which is why sport must be seen as a tool and should be funded by governments, taking into consideration its twofold character, as a means of protecting against and harbouring violence and extremism. National Government Organizations have the expertise, the scientific knowledge, the qualified personnel and necessary data to decide which sport and at what cost a specific result can be brought towards a specific direction. They must be involved not only in the implementation of the programmes but also in their development. Furthermore, national policies need to focus on preventing and tackling crime instead of obtaining medals, even if this needs to lead to smaller numbers on the medal table for the country or requires a larger portion of the national budget.

It should, of course, be stressed that the effectiveness of measures aimed at preventing violent extremism through sport requires long-term implementation as such problems cannot be tackled with quick-fire solutions. Careful and long-term planning, with measures specifically designed for the needs of the region concerned and the particular local social conditions for which they are intended, is necessary, always taking into account the capacity of sport to function as a network, something that can also assist in the aims of preventing and countering violent extremism.