Parliamentary **Assembly**
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Discrimination against women and girls in sport

Recommendation 1701 (2005)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 949th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (1 December 2005)

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully considered Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1701 (2005) on discrimination against women and girls in sport. It has forwarded the recommendation to the governments of member states, and to the Committee for the Development of Sport (CDDS) and the Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG). The comments from the CDEG and the opinion of the Bureau of the CDDS are reproduced in the appendices to this reply.

2. The Declaration adopted at the Warsaw Summit once more strongly condemned all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on sex, and the Heads of States and Government affirmed their determination to further implement equal opportunity policies in member states and to step up efforts to achieve real equality between women and men in all spheres of society. The Committee of Ministers shares the Assembly's view that discrimination against women and girls in sports participation and sports administration must be combated in the same way as all other forms of discrimination. The Council of Europe's existing regulatory framework offers the necessary means to fight many of the aspects of this discrimination referred to by the Assembly in its recommendation.

3. In addition to the provisions of the European Sports Charter to which the Assembly refers, the Committee of Ministers wishes to make reference to the guidelines set out in its Recommendations R (98) 14 on gender mainstreaming, Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making and Rec(2003)6 on improving physical education and sport for children and young people in all European countries. The Committee of Ministers encourages governments of its member states to implement the measures advocated in these recommendations in order to help combat discrimination against women and girls in sport.

4. With regard to the intergovernmental activities which the Assembly recommends be undertaken by the competent steering committees (paragraph 7.i and ii of the Recommendation), the Committee of Ministers wishes to draw the Assembly's attention to the work carried out by the CDEG in different fields within its competence (see the CDEG's comments in Appendix 1) which could be very useful for promoting an equal participation of women and girls in sport. The Committee of Ministers also invites the Assembly to note the comments made by the Bureau of the CDDS on the various aspects the Assembly proposes to include in a "European Strategy for Women and Sport" (see Appendix 2), while bearing in mind that the future framework for the activities in the field of sport will be considered in the context of the discussions on the 2006 and 2007 Budget and Programme of Activities.

Appendix 1 to the reply

Comments prepared by the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG)

The CDEG welcomed the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1701 (2005) on discrimination against women and girls in sport.

The CDEG shared the concerns of the Parliamentary Assembly in relation to the frequent discrimination that women still suffer in access to, and practice of, both amateur and professional sport. Furthermore, the CDEG pointed out that discrimination against women is still evident in some important aspects in the sports field such as mentoring and coaching sportswomen.

The CDEG also shared the opinion of the Parliamentary Assembly that the lack of women on sport's ruling bodies constitutes a particular obstacle to the achievement of equality between women and men in sport. In this respect, the CDEG would like to recall that some of the measures contained in Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making could apply to increase the participation of women in the decision-making bodies of sports federations and associations.

The CDEG agreed with the recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly on the need to use the gender mainstreaming strategy in sports policies. In this respect, the CDEG would like to recall that Recommendation No. R (98) 14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender mainstreaming recommends the wide dissemination of the CDEG's report on gender mainstreaming and encourages its use as a tool for implementing this strategy in the public and private sector. The Committee of Ministers also adopted a message to Steering Committees of the Council of Europe encouraging them to use this strategy in their programmes of activities.

The CDEG also agreed with the Parliamentary Assembly (item 7.i.c.) on the importance of taking gender into consideration in the allocation of funds intended for sports activities. In this respect, the CDEG underlined that its report on gender budgeting could be very useful for these purposes.

Appendix 2 to the reply

Opinion of the Bureau of the Committee for the Development of Sport (CDDS)

1. The Bureau of the CDDS noted with great interest Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1701 (2005) on discrimination against women and girls in sport.

2. It shares the Assembly's view that discrimination against women and girls (including those with disabilities) in sports participation and sports administration should be combated in the same way as all other forms of discrimination have to be combated. The Bureau of the CDDS recognises that the issue of discrimination against women and girls in sport is a matter of continuing concern for sports policy makers and sports organisations.

3. The Bureau of the CDDS recalls the general principles set out in the Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights that prohibits any discrimination based primarily on sex, with respect to the rights it protects. This principle underlines article 4.1 of the European Sports Charter, Recommendation R (92) 13 revised – "no discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status, shall be permitted in the access to sports facilities or sports activities."

4. The Bureau of the CDDS recalls that the issue of women in sport was first mentioned in the Council of Europe's agenda in 1980 and that at the 3rd Conference of European Ministers of Sport in 1981 a resolution was adopted on greater involvement of women in sport.

5. The Bureau of the CDDS shares the Assembly's view on welcoming the progress made in the field of combating discrimination against women and girls in sports. The CDDS at the time made the Brighton Declaration of 1994 its own. Since then substantial work has been performed by the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) and the European Women and Sport network (EWS) leading to the Calls for Action from succeeding World Conferences on Women in Sport (Windhoek 1998), Helsinki European Women and Sport Conference (2000), most recently the 5th and 6th European Women and Sport (EWS) Conferences (Berlin 2002 and Paris 2004).

6. The Bureau of the CDDS recalls the Resolution III on the European Sports Co-operation for the period 2004-2008, adopted during the 10th Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport in Budapest (14-15 October 2004) which underlines that "the Council of Europe's particular role in pan-European sports co-operation is linked to the core values of the Council of Europe (human rights, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law) and that future work in sport should bring out this connection more strongly; examples of such activities are combating racism, xenophobia, gender discrimination and also at promoting equal opportunity for disabled persons."

7. The Bureau of the CDDS welcomes the progress made in the field of collecting information and conducting the research on participation of women and girls in sports. The Bureau considers, however, that there still remains a lot to be done to eradicate discrimination against women and girls in sport. According to

different statistical sources, over half (51%) of girls aged 11 to 16 would rather do other things in their free time than sport or exercise,[1] 40% of girls have dropped out of sports activity by the time they reach 18[2] and less than one in four (23%) of sports board members are women.[3]

8. The Bureau of the CDDS shares the concern of the Assembly on the issue of representation of women in the international level of sport's ruling bodies. Despite the special target set by the International Olympic Committee for 2005 of at least 20% of all decision-taking posts in international federations to be held by women, it seems highly improbable that it will be achieved (in 2000 when the target was set at 10%, only 66% of National Olympic Committees and 43% of international federations achieved it).[4]

9. With regard to the Assembly's opinion to make an in-depth study of national sport policies and their impact on women's and girls' participation in sport activities and to work out a "European Strategy for Women and Sport", the Bureau of the CDDS, taking into consideration the financial constraints of the Sport Department budget, decided to ask member states of the CDDS to express their interest in further work or studies on this topic or on a particular aspect of it. If the results from this enquiry prove positive, the Bureau has decided to include this issue on the agenda of the next meeting of the Steering Committee and, subject to its agreement, in the work programme for 2007. The assistance of the European Union could also be requested in this work.

10. With respect to the precise points raised in the Assembly's Recommendation 1701 (2005), the Bureau of the CDDS would like to inform the Committee of Ministers that:

- issues connected to physical education for girls in schools, awareness-raising and information campaigns on the necessity of practising sport are dealt under the Recommendation Rec(2003)6 on improving physical education and sport for children and young people in all European countries, which calls for different actions at the local (family, school and local community), national and European dimensions; women and sport was also a main theme of the UNESCO Sports Ministers' Conference (MINEPS IV) in Athens in December 2004. It will be the sole theme of the XVII European Sports Conference in September 2005.

- an issue of public action for promoting sport (gender mainstreaming) and the allocation of funds intended for sports activities (gender budgeting) is a matter of national policies of CDDS countries;

- with respect to violence, racism, sexual harassment and abuse to be fought against in sport and amongst spectators, the Bureau of the CDDS feels that this question falls mainly under the Standing Committee on the Spectator Violence Convention. In this context, the Standing Committee during its annual meeting in 2004 adopted the following statement: "All spectators, irrespective of age, gender, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation, should be able to attend sporting events in safety, security and comfort, without discrimination." The CDDS Bureau would add that this applies also for sportswomen with a disability;

- International Federations, International Olympic Committee and other appropriate bodies (and not the CDDS) are responsible for support for women's participation in top-level sport and equal treatment for women and men in terms of pay, prize-money and bonuses derived from professional sport;

- the issue of involving women to a greater part in sport's ruling bodies and decision-making is a matter of the national specialised organisations of CDDS member countries;

- the European Women and Sport network has an expertise in collecting the gender-specific statistics for enabling the impact on women and men of sport promotion policies to be gauged (see point 8);

- the Bureau of the CDDS would like to point out already achieved progress in the media coverage of the sports played by women and athlete representation more in conformity with the spirit of sport.

11. Lastly, with regard to the Assembly's view on holding a Ministerial conference on the issue of discrimination against women and girls in sport, the Bureau of the CDDS agrees that this subject, merits discussion at Sports Ministers' level, particularly from the angle of exchanging good practices.

[1] Young people and sport in England, 2002.
[2] Youth Sports Trust, 2000.
[3] UK Sport report 2005 (Progress made towards objectives and targets in 2004 and analysis of the current situation).
[4] Sources: http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/women/leaders_uk.asp.