



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Thomas Bach
President

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You don't know what a pleasure it is to attend, finally, an in-person meeting. I have been longing for this moment for 14 months. Thank you already, Aleksander, for making this possible.

It is very refreshing to be able to be here with you in person.

The fact that you are able to hold this Congress in person, while respecting the public anti-coronavirus measures, gives us all good reason for optimism. This is why I would like to congratulate UEFA, under the great leadership of my dear friend Aleksander Ceferin, for having overcome the many challenges to make this Congress possible in a safe way.

UEFA and all of you, the European Football Associations, demonstrated this ability to overcome challenges also when it comes to organising live sports events in a safe way. During the first months of the pandemic, and continuing to this day, you managed to organise thousands of football games in countries across all of Europe.

In this respect, our organisations share the unprecedented experience of having postponed our major events: UEFA Euro 2020 and the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. We set the same priority of ensuring the health and safety of all participants.

This is exactly the reason why we can learn from each other when it comes to effective COVID-19 countermeasures. We, on our side, will certainly be closely watching UEFA Euro 2020 and incorporate your experience in the overall COVID-19 countermeasures that will be in place in Tokyo.

The many world championships and world cups that have been held during these recent weeks and months are proof that sport can be organised safely and successfully, even under present restrictions. Since September 2020, the International Sports Federations have collectively organised over 340 major sporting events, meaning only world championships or world cups. Cumulatively, these events have involved over 41,000 athletes. All of them had rigorous health



and safety protocols in place, including extensive testing regimes, which far exceeded 200,000 tests.

Not a single one of these events turned into a virus-spreader. So, we have clear and obvious proof that very big international sports events with a large number of international participants can be organised while safeguarding the health of everyone. And this is without having access to vaccination, from which we – both UEFA and the IOC – can greatly benefit at UEFA Euro 2020 and, even more, later, at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

This is why a safe and successful UEFA Euro 2020 will also greatly contribute to creating confidence in the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. For this, I would like to thank UEFA and all of you, all the member federations, already now.

When the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 finally get underway on 23 July, it will send a powerful message of solidarity, resilience and hope to the world. The Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will be the light at the end of the dark tunnel that we are still in at this moment. And, also in this respect, football will once again play a special role.

As my dear IOC colleague and friend, FIFA President Gianni Infantino, greatly appreciates, the Olympic football tournament begins a few days before the Opening Ceremony. In other words, football will be sending the very first light at the end of the tunnel to the billions of people around the world.

This is why I would like to say thank you. Thank you to UEFA and thank you to FIFA for demonstrating in a great way that, whether in sport or in the many challenges in life, we are always stronger together.

This is the lesson that we have learned from the coronavirus crisis: we need more solidarity. We need more solidarity within societies, and we need more solidarity among societies. This lesson applies to everybody, so it also applies to sport and sports organisations.

The crisis has already changed our world in profound ways. Nobody should even dream of going back to the way things were before the crisis. Even once we have finally overcome the health crisis, we will still face the far-reaching political, social, financial and economic



consequences. In so many ways, the crisis has revealed and even deepened existing fault lines and inequities. In this polarising environment, narrow self-interest and egotism have been gaining ground over solidarity, shared values and common rules.

We can only address the challenges of the post-coronavirus world in solidarity. This means, for us, solidarity within sports organisations and solidarity among sports organisations.

In this respect, the European Sport Model is a unique approach to organised sport that can give us good guidance for the role of sport in shaping the post-coronavirus world. The European Sport Model reflects the specific organisation, as well as the fundamental social and educational function, of sport. It is built on solidarity and volunteers. It is based on the twin principles of financial solidarity, which allows revenues generated at the elite level to be reinvested at the lower level. It is grounded in the openness of fair competition, which gives priority to sporting merit.

But unfortunately, we have to realise that this European Sport Model is under threat today. In fact, the very existence of the values-, solidarity- and volunteer-based model is under threat. It is challenged by a purely profit-driven approach that ignores the intrinsic values and social mission of sport and the real needs of the post-coronavirus world. It is under threat because the social mission of sports organisations is losing ground to the purely profit-oriented goals of commercial sport providers and investors.

If everything is only looked at from a business perspective, if only economic rules are applied to measure the impact of sport on society, then the social mission of sport is lost.

This is why, in solidarity, we all, together in the international sports community, have to make all efforts to preserve this social mission of sport.

The post-coronavirus world will need this social mission of sport, and it will need more solidarity. This is why the IOC is fully committed to continuing to promote the role of values-based sport in society. After all, our mission, enshrined in the Olympic Charter, is to put sport at the service of society and to make the world a better place through sport.



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In this Olympic spirit, I thank you, dear Aleksander, once more, for this very kind invitation, and I think it goes without saying, my dear fellow friends of football, that you will have fruitful and lively discussions today, so no need to express my wishes for this on this occasion. I just wish you a very successful UEFA Congress and then, for all of us, a very successful UEFA Euro 2020.

Thank you very much again.