Report Opening Conference, Interviews, Panel 1

Yves Le Lostecque (Head of the sport unit of the European Commission) welcomed all participants and invited the Lithuanian Director General for Sport Klemensas Rimselis, to open the conference on behalf of the president of Lithuania, Madam Dalia Grybauskaite.

In the opening speech European Commission Director Youth and Sport, Chiara Gariazzo, explained the background of the initiative of Commissioner Vassiliou to renew the attention on gender equality in sport and the aim of the conference to discuss future actions in this field.

The opening speech was followed by an interview of three women testimonials on their personal experience of being a woman in the world of sport as athlete, coach and as decision maker:

- Esther Vergeer, Paralympic champion wheel chair tennis: she stressed the need for role models and, as a consequence, the important role that the media have to play. The London Paralympic games, for example, had a huge impact.
- Ulla Koch, National team coach Gymnastics: pointed out that most coaches are volunteers and that often women still have family responsibilities preventing them from taking up this role, unless it becomes a paid job.
- Clémence Ross, member of Women and Sport Committee of the UEFA, Manager Women football Dutch Football Association: underlined the importance of the UEFA's women committee to drive changes in mentality.

The interview was moderated by the Italian journalist, EOC women and sport commission member and Olympic champion, Novella Calligaris, who was also the moderator of the two panel debates in the conference.

Panel debate 1 - Call for Strategic Actions

In the panel debate the three testimonials were joined by Sir Philip Craven, president of the International Paralympic Committee, Marisol Casado, IOC member and president of the international Triathlon Union and Daina Gudzinevičiūtė, president of the Lithuanian National Olympic Committee.

The discussion focused on the importance of gender equality in sport and the need for concrete and strategic actions. The panellists discussed how the progress in gender equality in sport could be accelerated and presented their position on what could be done concretely in this field.

Sir Philip Craven underlined the importance of gender issues for the IPC, who, for example, was committed in addressing access for women to traditionally male sport disciplines (such as ice-sledge hockey). While only 3 out of 12 board members are women, it should be pointed out that there were only 4 candidates. The IPC also introduced the concept of "womentoring", or mentoring for women. He also pointed out that it is not strictly about "more rights", but rather about proving that women have skills and in this sense it is important to change perceptions, not just impose legislation.

On the other hand, Marisol Casado (IOC) admitted that quotas, albeit for a short period of time, can be a means to obtain more role models. She also insisted on the importance of professionalisation, to give access to women that otherwise cannot afford voluntary work. Concretely, gender equality is now a priority for the IOC and they offer financial assistance to NOCs to empower women both as participants and administrators.

Novella Calligaris underlined that we should also be creative: mixed relays could be introduced in many sport disciplines, for example swimming.

Daina Gudzinevičiūtė pointed out that only 2 NOC presidents are women (out of 205). It is important to promote leadership, and for this there is a "women sport commission".

Esther Vergeer stressed the importance of setting concrete goals, to be able to measure progress and success. Clemence Ross agreed that, indeed, targets are not just numbers, they can be performance indicators.

Clemence Ross underlined the importance of making a business case, as it is not just "the right thing to do", but that it also makes sense from a business point of view.