

Madame Commissioner,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Minister of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Poland Mr Adam Giersz I would like to sincerely thank you for invitation to participate in this conference. At the same time I would like to congratulate the organisers, the Commission, for choosing the important topic of the activity of sports agents, and for selecting excellent speakers to present a whole range of issues relating to the main subject of the conference.

One of the three main priorities of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU is the protection of the integrity of sport. The last Informal Meeting of EU Ministers Responsible for Sport, held in Kraków last month, was primarily devoted to this issue. It focused mainly on the fight against match-fixing which is increasingly considered to be the greatest threat to the integrity of sport.

According to carried out studies and widely known facts, certain forms of activity of sports agents should also be looked upon as threats to the integrity of sport. Hence, the topic is of great importance to our country, both in purely sporting and economic dimensions and in the context of international cooperation aimed at counteracting negative phenomena related to the activities of sports agents.

The dynamic development of the sports agents market, now lasting for over ten years, is a result of the increasing commercialisation and professionalisation of contemporary sport. The experience of many countries, including Poland, proves that sports agents' activity takes place primarily in the most popular sports characterised by large economic potential related to the scale of financial turnover generated by entities operating in them. Thus, it is seen to a great extent in team sports which in the case of our country include football, basketball and volleyball. In terms of the number of sports agents Poland is not an exception either: the vast majority of licensed sports agents operate in football.

It should be emphasised that in the contemporary sport, with its globalisation process, the specific nature of competition between sports clubs and the increasingly multinational composition of club teams, the role of sports agents' activities is systematically growing. At the same time, what should be borne in mind is the sports agents' great responsibility towards represented athletes who seek employment. Due to the specificity of sporting career, support

of professional and reliable agent can have a major impact on athlete's sporting development and financial status.

Poland, like most European Union member states, has not regulated the legal status of sports agents in any specific legislation such as parliamentary act or secondary legislation. Instead, the work of sports agents is governed by general regulations on employment agency activity. Those regulations provide grounds for controlling only the legal and administrative dimensions of such work.

The rules of licensing sports agents and of their work in individual sports are set out in the regulations issued by some national federations in Poland. The sports dimension of the agents' work is regulated by sports authorities and public administration authorities have no competence in this field. Experience shows that this regulatory model exists in many EU Member States and that its functioning requires at least a discussion with all the stakeholders.

Undoubtedly, one of the threats to the integrity of sport, related to the work of sports agents, is the activity of persons who do not meet relevant legal requirements. This applies both to persons not licensed by competent sports authorities and to persons violating general regulations on employment agency activity in a given country. As confirmed by several cases, disclosed also in Poland, the transboundary nature of sports agents' work unfortunately contributes to the occurrence of such irregularities.

Moreover, the scale of financial turnover generated by the sports agents' market induces the occurrence of other negative phenomena associated with the agents' activity, such as non-transparency of financial transactions, tax evasion or money laundering. Also, decisive fight is required against criminal activities classified as human trafficking and against sports agents' practices which are detrimental to educational and sporting development of young players or which consist in making use of athletes' immaturity or lack of knowledge. The above-mentioned negative circumstances may also lead to corruption practices in sport, including match-fixing.

There is no doubt that the development of a clear, coherent, transparent and effective system regulating the activity of sports agents requires cooperation of all stakeholders, in particular the European Union institutions, the EU Member States' sports administrations, international sports organisations, as well as organisations representing sports agents, players, sports clubs and professional leagues. Issues that can be regarded as necessarily requiring such cooperation include: supervision and control over the activities of sports agents;

transparency of transactions concluded by the agents; requirements for license granting, and requirements to be met by contracts concluded by the agents.

Due to the complexity of the system for sports agents, regular exchange of good practices is desirable, both in the field of individual Member States' regulations and regulations of particular international federations. A significant role in this field should be played by the cooperation on the EU level. I am deeply convinced that the conference which has just started will be an excellent opportunity to exchange experience, present best practices and discuss further desired actions.

Thank you,