



International
Olympic
Committee

IOC President

Keynote speech for the EU Sport Forum 2025

10 April 2025

Dear Commissioner Micallef,

Dear EOC President, my dear colleague and friend, Spyros Capralos,

Distinguished delegates,

Please allow me to first thank Commissioner Glenn Micallef for inviting me to this year's EU Sport Forum. Unfortunately, I cannot be with you in person in beautiful Krakow. As you may know, we are in a transition period at the IOC. My successor, the IOC President-elect Kirsty Coventry, is currently in Lausanne, preparing for the handover of the Presidency in June. This is why I ask for your understanding that I can only contribute to your important discussions via live video link.

This Forum comes at an exciting time for sport in Europe, with the Olympic Games Paris 2024 still fresh in our memory. The European athletes and their amazing performances brought so much pride and joy to all the people of Europe. In Paris, European athletes won a remarkable 448 medals – by far the most of any continent. Also in this way, the European athletes contributed to the great success of the Olympic Games Paris 2024.

We are very happy and proud that we were able to bring together the athletes from the territories of all 206 National Olympic Committees and the IOC Refugee Olympic Team. We managed this despite the scepticism and even resistance that some of you may recall. In Paris, the athletes competed fiercely against each other. At the same time, they lived peacefully together under one roof in the Olympic Village. The athletes even came together to make a moving call for peace. This call for peace included athletes from the NOCs of Ukraine, Russia, Israel, Palestine, Yemen and many others whose countries are currently divided by war and conflict. The athletes showed us how our world would be, if we all were to live in this Olympic spirit of peaceful co-existence. They created a culture of peace. This message of togetherness, of joie de vivre – this message of peace: this is what people in Europe and all around the world were longing for. These Olympic Games captured the hearts and minds around the globe: around 5 billion people followed them, making them the most followed Olympic Games ever.

These were truly Olympic Games of a new era: the youngest, most urban, most inclusive, most sustainable Olympic Games ever. The first-ever Olympic Games with full gender parity. The first Olympic Games fully in line with our Olympic Agenda reforms. The Olympic Games were shining in a new light in Paris. And Paris was shining in the Olympic light.

We can only make the Olympic Games such a symbol of global unity and peace through a fundamental commitment to political neutrality and universality. In our world torn apart by so much hate, wars and division, the Olympic Games are the only event that still unites the entire world in peaceful competition.

In Paris, everybody saw how well our procedure worked to include Individual Neutral Athletes. In this way, we ensured that sport contributes to peace, to build bridges, and not to deepen confrontation.

This is only possible if we in sport are not torn apart by political, religious, cultural or other interests. Therefore, we at the IOC must always be politically neutral and stand against any kind of discrimination. This commitment to political neutrality is what allowed the Olympic athletes to send a resounding message from Paris to all humankind: Yes, it is possible to build a better, a more peaceful world through sport, if we respect the same rules and one another.

Very soon, the spotlight will shine on Europe once again, with the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026. For the second consecutive time, the world's best athletes will come together on our continent in peaceful competition. This is an opportunity to showcase the best of Italy and of Europe to the world: our sporting traditions, our commitment to sustainability, and the power of sport to bring people together. These will be the first Olympic Winter Games fully benefiting from our Olympic Agenda reforms, in particular by using existing world class venues in iconic winter sport locations. Together with our Italian partners and friends we are looking forward to Olympic Winter Games that will pulsate with Italy's passion for sport and highlight Italy's unique culture and heritage.

This EU Sport Forum is therefore a timely reminder of what unites us: our shared belief in the unifying power of sport. The Olympic ideal of developing sport to promote peace and understanding among nations is also intrinsically linked to the values at the heart of the European project.

The European Sports Model – grounded in solidarity, voluntary work, openness and the autonomy of sport organisations – is a manifestation of this belief. It is more than a framework for sport: it is a blueprint for sport as a force for good in society. This is why we, collectively, need to strengthen the European Sport Model. Because sport can only make a positive impact if its autonomy and solidarity-based structure are respected and supported by public authorities.

Continued support from the EU and its Member States is therefore essential, especially when it comes to the autonomy of sport. This autonomy allows sports organisations to achieve their mission without political interference. In this way – and only in this way – sport can be a unifying force. As we saw in Paris, despite vocal resistance, we managed to bring together the athletes from the territories of all 206 National Olympic Committees without any discrimination and incident whatsoever. This is why the IOC appreciates Commissioner Micallef's commitment to promoting the European Sports Model and supporting the autonomy of sport.

Autonomy and good governance are two sides of the same coin. If we expect politics to respect our autonomy, politics can expect us to uphold the highest standards of good governance. With our Olympic Agenda reforms, we are doing exactly this. Our accounts are audited at a much higher standard than legally required. Our annual report and auditing make all our financial flows transparent. We have a highly respected Ethics Commission. We promote gender equality and sustainability. These and many other initiatives show: We walk the talk.

Integrity also means protecting athletes and the entire sporting community from harassment and abuse. This is why the IOC launched the Safe Sport Hubs initiative to create safe sport environments. Following pilot projects in Southern Africa and the Pacific, a European hub will soon follow. These hubs bring together sport organisations, public authorities, and civil society. We urge the EU and its Member States to join this effort—because safe sport is a shared responsibility.

At the same time, we welcome the EU's recognition of sport as a catalyst for improving lives and building resilient communities. We are ready to play our part in this, as we are already successfully doing by strengthening the role of sport as an important enabler for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The UN Member States specifically designated sport as an important enabler for peace, health, education, social inclusion, gender equality, promoting tolerance, and others.

As the EU updates its strategies under the Polish EU presidency and beyond, we urge you to integrate sport as such an important enabler for your goals to improve lives of European citizens. In this respect, we strongly support Commissioner Micallef's call for cross-sector cooperation and deeper inclusion of sport in EU policies. And I can assure all of you, the Commission and all Member States, that we are ready to team up with you.

To contribute to the EU's social development goals, we are already collaborating with the EU system. I strongly encourage the Member States to replicate this model of cooperation. Engage with your National Olympic Committee and integrate sport into your development plans. By doing so, we create a win-win situation to make sport a force for good for all EU citizens.

To realise this vision we must embrace new opportunities, in particular artificial intelligence. With our Olympic AI Agenda, we want to harness the benefits of AI for sport in a responsible way. In sport, we are not confronted with the ultimate ethical question of AI replacing humans. The 100 metres will always have to be run by an athlete – a human being. Therefore, when it comes to AI, we can concentrate on supporting the human being. This is why our approach to AI is athlete-centred and human-centred. And we will live up to our vision of equality through solidarity by making the benefits of AI available to everyone in the Olympic Movement around the globe.

As a global organisation, we cannot achieve our vision and our mission without global regulation. While we welcome the EU AI Act, we also urge the EU to contribute to a global regulatory framework that upholds human dignity, encourages technological innovation and ensures equitable progress within and among societies.

AI is just one example of a new world order that is in the making. Historic disruptions are reshaping the international system that has existed since the second World War. We see economic decoupling; growing nationalism; “Global South” vs “Global North”; we are seeing a retreat from multilateralism. Cooperation and compromise—once the foundation of international relations—are sadly considered disparaging terms.

These trends are deeply disturbing to the Olympic Movement because they run counter to our mission to unite. At the same time, it is also crystal clear that in such volatile times, the Olympic Games and their message of peace and solidarity are more important than ever. That is why we are more determined than ever to do everything within our power to bring the entire world together in peaceful competition.

Since my presidency nears its end, please accept my heartfelt thanks for over a decade of partnership with you, our European partners and friends. It has been an honour to share this journey with you.

My successor, the IOC President-elect Mrs Kirsty Coventry will take office on Olympic Day, the 23rd of June. As a two-time Olympic champion and a longtime elected athlete representative, she understands the power and values of sport like few others. As a former sports minister, she also shares many of your experiences in shaping sport policy. This is why I ask you to offer her your good partnership and confidence.

Because it is only by joining hands that we can live our Olympic motto: Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together.

In this Olympic spirit, I wish you fruitful discussions and a successful EU Sports Forum.