

We are a European federation of independent athlete unions and associations. The organisations that we represent are created by athletes and for athletes. They are founded on freedom of association, a fundamental right that athletes, just as any other person, have. Being involved in the governance of their sport is a key objective of those organisations. They are often established because of the limitations of the representation by athlete commissions, committees or councils.

While athlete commissions are internal consultative bodies, independent associations are the ones that can engage in social dialogue and conclude collective agreements that protects the rights of athletes as people and workers.

We urgently need more social dialogue in sport. With numerous challenges facing sport sector today, social dialogue is an opportunity for athletes and employers to negotiate adequate solutions, tackling specific problems and taking into account the rights and interests of different parties.

Sport can only have a positive societal impact if the rights of athletes and other people involved are respected. However, sport organisations still get away with creating regulations that are not compatible with the fundamental rights of athletes. Athletes, who have not participated in the creation of those rules, have no other choice than to comply – otherwise they can lose their medal or be excluded from the competition.

Social dialogue, in which parties negotiate on equal terms, is a way to overcome this power imbalance. It ensures that athletes occupy the place that is rightfully theirs, at the very centre of the sport governance. There is no sport without athletes and it's about time we recognise there cannot be decision making without them either.

Sport is not above the law. The notions of autonomy, specificity or European Sport Model cannot be used to allow exceptional treatment in detriment of athlete rights. We must consider the recent judgements of the European Court of Justice stating that certain rules created by the international sport federations are not compatible with the EU law. This brings an opportunity for the rules of the game to be rewritten at the bargaining table, with athletes involved as partners, and not merely consulted.

The Member States, Council of Europe and EPAS have a key role to play. Athletes need you.

They need you to ensure the respect and protection of the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining. To recognise the importance of the independent athlete and player associations. To promote and engage in social dialogue and provide institutional support. They simply need you to create a legal and political framework in which they can be effectively involved in the collective governance, improving sport for athletes and for all.

We are looking forward to working alongside you towards this goal.

