

Warsaw, 23.02.2023

Joint statement of the representatives of the governments of Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia on solidarity with the Ukrainian sporting community

Once again strongly condemning Russia's barbaric, illegal, unprovoked and by any means unjustified aggression against Ukraine, as representatives of the governments of Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia, we call for strong solidarity with athletes, coaches and sports officials in Ukraine, even more so on the eve of the anniversary of Russia's shameful attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Thanking the Minister of Youth and Sports of Ukraine and the President of the Ukrainian National Olympic Committee Mr Vadym Guttsait for his update on the current situation in Ukraine and Ukrainian sports, we appreciate the vision of further actions under the current circumstances shared with the participants of the meeting.

Keeping in mind the ongoing debate on the international forum regarding sanctions against Russia and Belarus in the area of sport, we, as representatives of the neighbouring countries, are particularly obliged to uphold the position that Russia and Belarus must not be allowed to participate in international sports competitions in any form. Because of our historical experience, we are deeply convinced that relaxing the ban applied one year ago would be the wrong signal that might be used by Russia's regime and its propaganda to legitimize its crimes.

Since the outbreak of the war, sports competitions have been disrupted in Ukraine and many Ukrainian athletes have been forced to defend their homeland. Currently, in Ukraine there are no conditions for standard athletes' training. Many sports facilities have been destroyed, stadiums have been closed and in many cases they are used as shelters. Some clubs have had to relocate to the western part of the country. We believe it is time to start thinking and discussing the opportunities to support the restoration of Ukraine sports system and sport infrastructure.

In those terrifying circumstances and with many Ukrainian athletes defending their country and fulfilling their civic duties, others take part in competitions around the globe. Competing has become a patriotic mission. It gives focus and the conviction that athletes are doing something meaningful for their homeland even if they are not physically defending their families and communities as many others are. The spirit of sports, the same as the spirit of freedom must stay unbroken. Sport diplomacy plays a very important role in this regard. Their successes give the whole nation hope and a sense of pride. We call for the unwavering and continuing support of all those involved in international sport to Ukrainian athletes who are also the unspoken heroes of this war. This is the time to show unity and solidarity with them.

At the same time it is with sorrow that we receive the news of every death of members of the sporting community in Ukraine who lost their lives by Russian weapons. We extend our most sincere condolences to their families and friends, while admiring their courage and heroism. Each death of an Ukrainian athlete on the battlefield is a terrible and irreparable loss for the world of sport.

Taking into consideration the fact, that a year has passed since the start of the Russian barbarism, we once again appeal to all people of good will, people all around the world, for whom sport competitions are impossible without fair play, to respect each other and for solidarity with all its participants. Especially within the international sporting community, we ask for continued support and solidarity with Ukrainian athletes. Sport has the capability to stir powerful emotions and bring communities together. It can unite people and stress the values which are unbreakable. Now, more than ever, the Ukrainian sporting community deserves continued, united support.