

**Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland condemn the efforts of the International Olympic Committee to bring back the athletes of the aggressor countries, Russia and Belarus, into international competitions**

2 February 2023

We, the Sports Ministers of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland thank the sport movement for the solidarity with the Ukrainian people and for the support you have provided to all Ukrainian athletes, coaches, sports staff since the launch of massive military attack from Russia.

We, the Sports Ministers of the Baltic States and Poland, condemn the efforts of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to bring back the athletes of the aggressor countries, Russia and Belarus, into international competitions. At a time when free and democratic countries unite their forces to increase support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia's war of aggression supported by its ally Belarus and impose more sanctions on Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism, the IOC launches the search for special forms of participation for athletes from Russia and Belarus in international sports competitions including the Olympic Games in Paris in 2024, allowing sport to be used to legitimize and distract attention from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Efforts to return Russian and Belarusian athletes to international sports competitions under the veil of neutrality legitimize political decisions and widespread propaganda of these countries also through the use of sport as a distraction from the illegal aggression against Ukraine.

We highly appreciate all international sport organizations and federations that have removed athletes and representatives of Russia and Belarus from international competitions and organizations and we urge them not to change their position until Russia and Belarus stop their aggression against Ukraine. We need to ensure justice and accountability by bringing the perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide to justice. Taking into account the autonomy of the sport movement we call on all international sport bodies to follow this firm approach. The circumstances have not changed since the decision made on 28 February 2022 by the Executive Board of the IOC.

Bearing in mind the autonomy of the sport movement, we, the Sports Ministers of the Baltic States and Poland are convinced that allowing Russians and Belarusians to return to the international competitions could also put athletes in a difficult position and under extra pressure by competing against Russians and Belarusians or facing them and their supporters at sport events.

We will continue supporting Ukrainian athletes, coaches, sports staff, stakeholders and their country and defending our common values and interests of free and democratic states.

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