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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: AOB for the meeting of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council on
11 and 12 May 2026:
Participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in sport competitions in
Europe: policy and security considerations
- *Information from the Commission*

Participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in sport competitions in Europe: policy and security considerations

Information from the Commission

The European Commission would like to draw attention to the growing challenges related to the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in international and European sporting competitions under the standard protocol, using their flags, anthems and uniforms.

In 2022 the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Executive Board issued a recommendation to international sport federations and sport event organisers not to allow the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes and officials in international competitions. In 2023 the IOC recommended that Russian and Belarusian athletes compete as Individual Neutral Athletes (INA).

Although Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is still ongoing and there have been no changes to the political situation, with the war in its fourth year, on 11 December 2025 the IOC announced a shift in policy and recommended that Russian and Belarusian youth athletes are allowed to participate in international competitions under their respective national flags and anthems. They will be able to do so later this year in the Youth Olympic Games in Dakar. This also followed the decision of the International Paralympic Committee to allow the full reinstatement of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the 2026 Winter Paralympic Games in Milano-Cortina.

These developments have led to the decision of World Aquatics to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete under their national symbols. Other sport federations are considering following suit, with the President of FIFA saying that he favours the lifting of the ban that prohibits Russia from competing in international competitions.

It is important to underline that there have been no material changes which justify this shift in position in relation to Russia and Belarus. Russia is still waging a war of aggression against Ukraine, whilst it continues using sport as a platform for propaganda. Furthermore, despite its coordinated efforts to be readmitted to the global sport community as if normal conditions applied, Russia continues to target civilians and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, including sport facilities.

The participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes under their national symbols raises serious public order and security concerns for EU Member States hosting international and European sporting events and also the EU as a whole. This may also result in unfair situations whereby

athletes are sanctioned if they refuse to compete against Russian and Belarusian athletes using their national symbols.

While the European Commission respects the autonomy of sport organisations and the right of athletes to participate in sporting competitions, sporting bodies have to demonstrate responsibility towards public safety risks emanating from the removal of the neutral protocol applicable to Russian and Belarusian athletes.

Decisions of sport organisations that affect national and European security issues should not be taken in isolation and without consultations with relevant stakeholders, including public authorities. There is a need for better governance within sporting bodies to ensure that their decisions take all relevant factors into consideration, including the safety of athletes, fans and all other participants.

Sporting bodies also have to ensure that sporting events remain free from political propaganda and maintain a neutral space that unites people through fair competition and shared values, as also enshrined in the Olympic Charter and Olympic Truce.

Where and when Russian and Belarusian participation is considered, it should be only under strict, neutral conditions without state symbols and political representation.

The European Commission commends those Member States that have made a stand against the normalisation of Russian and Belarusian participation in sporting competitions using their flags, anthems and uniforms, and calls for continued coordination on this matter within the EU and like-minded countries.
