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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:

The impact of allowing athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete internationally under their national symbols on the organisation of sporting events in Europe

- Information from Poland, supported by Estonia, Finland, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Sweden

The impact of allowing athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete internationally under their national symbols on the organisation of sporting events in Europe

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We would like to draw the attention to the growing challenges facing the organisation of international sporting events in Europe, resulting from the readmission of athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete under their national symbols.

It is vital to continue supporting Ukraine – a country that is still defending itself against Russia’s war of aggression. In this context, we would like to express gratitude to the Member States for their expressions of solidarity with Ukraine during the recent Paralympic Games in Milan/Cortina d’Ampezzo. Many government representatives made the decision not to attend the opening ceremony due to the participation of athletes from Russia and Belarus in the Games under their national symbols. This was a significant and unambiguous demonstration of the European community's unity.

At the same time, we are watching the situation with concern as international sports federations gradually loosen their rules, increasingly allowing athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete under their national flags and anthems. We reassert that national symbols of aggressor states have no place at international sporting events. Such decisions taken by the international sports movement have consequences that extend beyond the sporting sphere, and are contributing to the normalization of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. We, as the EU member states may face political, social and organisational challenges when hosting sporting events. This concerns critical issues of national security and public order.

In this context, while fully respecting and recognising the independence and autonomy of sports organisations, we invite international sports federations to consider the broader context when making decisions and to engage in close dialogue with host countries. Otherwise, there is a risk that the ability to organise sporting events in Europe could be significantly curtailed. Furthermore, we call for continued coordination and exchange of information between Member States on this matter.