



# **Invisible**

## **Synopsis on Homophobia and Discrimination on Sexual Orientation in Sport**

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## Introduction

Although figures in countries vary, a substantial part of the European population practise sport. Participation in sport has many faces. People practise the sport they like only incidentally or on a frequent and regular basis. A substantial part of people perform sports in organised sports clubs. The levels of skill vary and sport might be done individually or within teams. For many people sport is an important aspect of their daily life. Moreover many people are attracted to sport as spectators. About 6% of the population is gay, lesbian or bisexual. These people participate in daily life as heterosexual people do and they practise sport. Especially in sport they are very often invisible.

Studies about homosexuality and sport as well as incidents reported by newspapers have shown that homophobia and a double moral standard on human rights are present in sports. Due to discrimination gays and lesbians are not always able to participate at their personal best sporting level, because they have to hide an important aspect of their identity. Moreover they feel discrimination which leads to social exclusion, personal problems and sometimes even to suicide.

Discrimination has come on the agenda especially in football, where racial discrimination has been recognized as a serious problem. The FARE network supported by the UEFA has started to fight successfully racism in football. That example shows, that sport can be an instrument to fight discrimination.

The paper is divided in four parts. The aim of the first chapter is to give an overview about the information which exists on homophobia in sports in Europe. It provides an outline of the main aspects of homophobia in sports as well as information about experiences in different kinds of sports and in different European countries. The second part is about the political implications to fight homophobia in sports. It gives an overview about the legal regulations on a European level as a framework to combat homophobia in sports. The third chapter contains suggestions about what needs to be done to fight homophobia in sports. The last chapter is about EGLSF (European gay and lesbian sports federation), which is the main European umbrella organisation for gay and lesbian matters in sports. One of the goals of the EGLSF is to fight against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in sport and to stimulate integration in sport and emancipation of lesbians and gays.

## **1 Homophobia and discrimination on sexual orientation in sport**

Homophobia in our society is linked to compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexism as important structures of western mainstream culture. Traditionally heterosexuality is regarded as a biological fact and as the natural way of life in our society. Homophobia is an important aspect to stabilise this setting. The Australian sports committee defines homophobia as “a fear or intolerance of homosexuality. It can show itself in form of prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders. Homophobia includes also displaying of intolerant attitudes and behaviour towards these groups” (Australian sports committee 2000). Kari Fastings definition is more concrete because she includes the expectations of the “right” behaviour. She defines homophobia as “the irrational fear and intolerance of homosexuality, gay men or lesbians, - and even behaviour that is perceived to be outside the boundaries of traditional gender role expectation”. She links homophobia to homonegativism, which is “a more inclusive term, describing purposeful, not irrational, negative attitudes and behaviours towards non heterosexuals” (Fasting 2003). Heterosexism refers to “a set of social practices, ideas and behaviours which act to reinforce the belief that heterosexual relations are the only truly ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ sexuality and that all other types of sexuality are consequently deviant, sick or ‘unnatural’” (McDowell and Sharp 1999: 123).

### ***1.1 Research about homosexuality and sports: only in a few countries research has been done***

In Europe homosexuality in connection with sports has not been very much on the agenda of research yet. There are only a few studies about homosexuality, homophobia and sports. Most of them are situated in small regional contexts and include only a few sports or concentrate on one sport. There has been research done in the Netherlands (Hekma 1994, Schuyf/Stoepler 1997), in Belgium (de Vos 2000), in Great Britain (King/Thomson), in Norway (Kolnes 1995, Fasting 2003), in Switzerland (Calmbach et. al. 2001) and in Germany (Papageorgiou/Boege 1997, Palzkill 1990, Pfister 1999). These studies deal with the situation of homosexuals and sports but not all of them concentrate on homophobia. Especially in southern and eastern European countries the situation of homosexuals and homophobia in sports has not been researched yet.

In the American context research about homosexuality and sport is more established. As sport is male dominated the situation of women in sports has been more researched, in that context the situation of lesbians is mentioned in some of the studies. A wide range of the existing research is on different aspects of the situation of women in sports (among others

Griffin 1992, Birrell and Cole 1998, Leskyi 1986). Only a few authors dealt with gay men's experience in mainstream sport (cited in King/Thomson: 4).

## ***1. 2 Gender issues and homophobia in sports***

We get our gender within a heterosexual paradigm, a paradigm which institutionalises certain images of femininity and masculinity as well as male domination and female subordination. Heterosexuality is inscribed in all social institutions. Gay men and lesbian women have different difficulties in living in a heterosexual environment and they are discriminated against in different ways. Especially lesbian women are affected by sexism linked to homophobia, which is a powerful political weapon of sexism (Griffin 1992). The lesbian label is used to define the boundaries for acceptable female behaviour in a patriarchal culture (Griffin 1992: 255).

Homophobia is very much supported by heterosexism. Together they force compulsory heterosexuality with a focus on the traditional and nuclear family as the norm of way of life (Pharr in Nottebaum 1998: 71). This again has different consequences for gay men and lesbian women. Gender studies have mostly focused on the discrimination of women, therefore the situation of lesbian women is much better researched than the discrimination of gay men.

Homosexuality, homophobia and sports are interlinked in a very specific way in our society. The organisation, institutions and structures of sport are based on compulsory heterosexuality. Values and rules of behaviour suggest that heterosexuality is the only and "right" way of sexual orientation. Sport is interpreted as a sphere of (heterosexual) masculinity. The consequences for women are that they enter a masculine sphere of life and therefore seem to be neither real women nor to be treated equally.

Participation in sports strengthens the male bond, as a display of traditional heterosexual masculinity. Sport is the venue where boys learn to be men and to maintain this position. Through aggressive play and verbal sparring boys are forced to create an identity which conforms to a narrow definition of masculinity. Through participation in the right sport in the right way masculinity can be displayed (King and Thomson: 6). Gay men who do not identify with these heterosexual rules feel out of place.

## ***1.3 Mainstream sport and top level sport***

There is a difference in doing sport as a leisure activity or doing sport on the top level, not only by the number of participants. Mainstream sport

covers all different kinds of sport people are doing in clubs in their spare time for leisure and fun. People do not get paid for their sports activities and do not participate in top level leagues. Professional sport instead is performed on a high level and sometimes sports people even earn their living by their sport activities. They are participating in top level leagues or are part of national teams. They are known by the public and often serve as role models. There is no exact boundary between these two categories because locally successful athletes can also be known in a regional context and act as role models for the local youth even if they do not participate in top level leagues. Mainstream sport and professional sport are both concerned by homophobia but in different ways. Because of their popularity there is high pressure on top level athletes not to come out with their homosexuality but to remain silent. As means of pressure they are threatened to be dismissed from teams and their lives seem to be destroyed afterwards. This might be one of the reasons why only very few top level athletes are open about their homosexuality in public. Therefore especially the situation of top level athletes is difficult to research because hardly anybody is out of the closet. Therefore most of the information we have is from athletes who have finished their careers. Researching the situation of people doing leisure sport is also difficult, most of the information we have is from studies where people have quit mainstream sports clubs and are part of gay and lesbian sports clubs.

#### ***1.4 The mechanisms of homophobia in sports***

All gay and lesbian athletes are concerned by what we call the prisoner's dilemma. The prisoner's dilemma shows that discrimination can only take place, if people come out of the closet and participate as lesbian and gay athletes in sports clubs, tournaments and competitions. The danger of experiencing a hostile atmosphere causes many people to remain deeply in the closet. Therefore silence is the most obvious strategy of homophobia being used. The problem is twofold. Athletes do not come out of the closet and therefore homosexuality is not a topic in mainstream sports clubs and sports clubs are often not aware about the heteronormativity that exists in their club. A recent Swiss study shows that only 3% of the interviewed trainers and officials in mainstream clubs have recognised homophobia in their sports clubs. 22% think that there are gays and lesbians in their club and 83% say, that homosexuality has never been a topic in the club (Calmbach 2001). Sport is an extremely heterosexual dominated social context where discrimination and homophobia seem to be structurally embedded. As long as gay and lesbian people do conceal their homosexuality there is space for them in mainstream sport. Experiences from different European studies show that most of the interviewed gay men and lesbian women conceal their homosexuality when participating in mainstream sport (Hekma 1994, Pfister 1999, Calmbach 2001, EGLSF 1999).

Only slightly different is the attitude that homosexuality is a private matter. That might include double standards: Behind an open minded foreground there is a negative background of non-acceptance and homophobia. Not talking about homosexuality and judging it as a private matter is also a part of silence. In addition it shows that lesbian women often are only seen as athletes and not with their entire personality. They are not accepted as lesbians but as athletes only (Pfister 1999).

Together with silence about homosexuality goes invisibility. Most respondents in different studies keep their sexual orientation hidden from their team mates or only come out to closer friends in the team (Hekma 1994, Calmbach 2001, Fechtig 1995). By silence and invisibility the strong impact of heterosexuality remains stable in sports. This structural form of homophobia in sports has various effects: people do not come out at sports, young homosexuals are inhibited in developing their identity and people refrain from organised mainstream sport (Hekma 1994). It seems as if homosexuals are accepted in mainstream sports clubs but only as long as they do not make an issue of their homosexuality (Hekma 1994). That shows again the heterosexual atmosphere in mainstream clubs which makes it difficult for homosexuals to come out or to be accepted as a homosexual person and not only as an athlete. This makes both parties become a prisoner for the other.

Gert Hekma reports in his study that the majority of interviewed gay and lesbian athletes did not and does not feel discriminated against because of their homosexuality. This results from the silence and invisibility (Hekma 1994). De Vos comes to similar results, in her study 68% did not feel discriminated against (De Vos 2000).

### **1.5 Discrimination**

Only a few athletes dare to come out of the closet. Especially in top level sport there are only a few athletes out to the public. For mainstream sport the study of Beatrice Calmbach shows that only 3% of the interviewed gay and lesbian athletes are open about their sexual orientation. 64% came out to certain team mates (Calmbach 2001). Especially in women's football and in women's handball there are openly lesbian women playing. At the same time football is the sport with the most discrimination reported (Hekma 1994, Pfister 1999, Fechtig 1995, Scraton et. al. 1999).

Homosexuals who do come out of the closet do face discrimination. The results presented here concentrate on mainstream sport. One third of the women and one quarter of the men who participated in regular organised sports reported incidents. Lesbians encounter more discrimination than men, and moreover the discrimination is more blatant. (Hekma 1994). The results of Beatrice Calmbach are different. She reported that 74% of the interviewed gay men and 59% of the lesbian

women felt discriminated against (Calmbach 2001). An explanation for these different results could be the different settings in countries or the different kind of sports. A study about gay volleyball players found out, that 20% felt discriminated against in mainstream clubs (Papageorgiou 1997). The more qualitative studies do not have figures but they also report discrimination of homosexuals when coming out of the closet (Fechtig 1995, Palzkill 1990, Pfister 1999).

### 1.5.1 Forms of discrimination

There is a range of patterns reported how gays and lesbians are discriminated against in mainstream sports clubs. Gay and lesbian people do not feel at home at regular sport clubs or at regular sports. They feel excluded because of their different life style and interests (all girls of the team are interested in boys, only the lesbian is not). They have a feeling of insecurity and they dislike the silence about the way of life of gay and lesbian people.

The most reported discrimination is verbal harassment, more than half of reported discrimination is by verbal irritation (Calmbach 2001). Abusive language is often not directed at anyone particular, but very usual on sports grounds. The use of negative terms for gay and lesbians links being gay and lesbian to being bad at sports. By the use of these expressions heterosexuality is stabilised as the only form of living and there is no space for gay and lesbians to be open about their sexual orientation (Hekma 1994).

Discriminatory behaviour is often linked to eroticism in spaces like locker rooms or showers. Team mates become nervous and do not want to be in the locker room or the shower with people openly gay or suspected as gay (EGLSF 1999a). Thus discrimination often comes from team mates and not from outside. That means that gay and lesbian people have to face discrimination also from people they play with.

Moreover there exist more extreme forms of harassment like physical violence, exclusion from clubs or serious problems especially when homosexuals are open about their homosexuality in mainstream clubs. People fear that others could be infected, especially young girls and boys are not allowed by their parents to join sports clubs where openly gay and lesbian athletes are members.

One alarming consequence of discrimination is that gay and lesbian athletes leave mainstream sport clubs because of the negative atmosphere against homosexuals. Athanasios Papageorgiou and Ulrich Boge report that nearly 60% of volleyball players in gay clubs have played volleyball in mainstream clubs before. The reasons to change the club and join a gay volleyball team are concentrated around the topic of coming out and moving to a big city because of the greater possibility to



live openly gay. (Papageorgiou/Boge 1997). The study of de Vos shows, that 72% of the people who are in gay and lesbian sport clubs today have been doing sport in mainstream clubs before, but only 11% practise sport in a mainstream club right now. That shows a substantial drop out of regular sport clubs when something is offered especially for gay and lesbian people (de Vos 2000).

### ***1.6 Gender differences***

Gender differences in the situation of gay men and lesbian women have been discussed already. The extremely masculine sphere of sport has different consequences on gay men and lesbian women. Gay men are regarded as effeminate and lesbian women are seen as masculine. These prejudices and stereotypes correspond with the level, on which gay and lesbians do sport. In their youth lesbians do sport on a higher level than men, who mostly do sports only on a low or medium level. Of course this does not mean that lesbians are better at sport but it supports the prejudice that bad sport performance is linked to being gay. This is problematic for young gays who find out that being good at sport and being gay is incompatible (Hekma 1994). Other studies come to a similar result. A study about gay volleyball players reports that gay men often start their sports career later than heterosexual men. The reason could be the dislike of sports of gay boys even if they did not know they were gay at that time (Papageorgiou 1997). Already at school in sports classes gay men and lesbian women make different experiences. 41% of the lesbians were positively influenced doing further sports (13% negative, 46% no influence). 43% of the gay men were negatively influenced (16% positive, 41% no influence) (Calmbach 2001).

Sport offers lesbian girls an opportunity to stay among female friends and not only to bother about boyfriends and make up. Sport seems to play a more important role to lesbian women than to gay men. Just as more gay men report going to bars regularly lesbian women report going to sport clubs. Lesbians are regarded as masculine and as sport is regarded as a masculine sphere of life they are more active and visible in sports but on the other hand they face more direct discrimination than gay men who remain largely invisible (Hekma 1994: 7)

### ***1.7 Different kinds of sport***

The most discrimination against individuals has been reported from women's football (Hekma 1994, Pfister 1999, Fechtig 1995, Scraton et. al. 1999). Football is a very popular and masculine sport. Women playing football are called mannish women or lesbians and therefore not real women. To be athletic as a woman is equated with masculinity and masculine women are labelled as lesbians.

Homophobia together with racism and sexism is an important topic in top level football. The awareness about racism and discrimination in football has increased in the last years in different European countries (Germany, Austria, Italy, United Kingdom, Poland) and several organisations have been founded to fight racism in football. EGLSF is part of the network FARE (Football against racism in Europe) (Bündnis Aktiver Fußballfans 2003).

Apart from football, discrimination in particular sports has not been researched yet in an European context. In most of the sports silence seems to be the most important form of discrimination.

### ***1.8 The situation in different European countries***

In most of the big European cities a gay and lesbian sub-culture has been established in the last 15 years. Besides bars, nightclubs and social institutions gay and lesbian sports clubs have been established. Most of the information about homophobia and discrimination in mainstream sport is reported from people, who have quit mainstream sports clubs and have changed to gay and lesbian clubs. Therefore in countries with a bigger gay and lesbian infrastructure gay and lesbian people come out of the closet and report about experiences in different aspects of life (families of origin, workplaces, sport clubs). Moreover in countries with a vivid gay and lesbian scene and a more favourable political situation for gays and lesbians the possibility of research is bigger than in countries where homosexuality is not accepted in society. Moreover the establishment of gay and lesbian sports clubs and therefore the destabilisation of the heterosexual norm in our society is only possible when sports groups get sports facilities, are allowed to participate in official competitions and are accepted as an institution beside mainstream clubs. Therefore in countries with more gay and lesbian friendly politics more homophobia is reported because it is more researched. But we assume that the discrimination in countries without gay and lesbian friendly politics is as high, maybe even higher.

#### **1.8.1 The Netherlands and Belgium**

In Europe homosexuality and sports is best researched in The Netherlands and in Belgium. The studies show that gays and lesbians in gay and lesbian sports clubs do not feel much discrimination but in mainstream sports clubs they do (Hekma 1994, de Vos 2000). Because of that they move from mainstream sports clubs to gay and lesbian clubs. With the foundation "Homosport Netherlands" (GISAH) there exists a national advocate to improve the situation of gays and lesbians in mainstream sports clubs. The study of Judith Schuyf and Lucien Stöpler

concentrates on the possibilities of cooperation between mainstream and gay and lesbian clubs with the same goal as GISAH (Schuyf/Stöpler 1997). Gert Hekma was the first, who researched discrimination and homophobia in sports in The Netherlands (Hekma 1994). In Belgium de Vos researched the situation of discrimination among all gay and lesbian sports clubs in Belgium (de Vos 2000).

The traditional club culture is white and heterosexual and this makes the access of mainstream sport clubs for some people difficult. In The Netherlands the policy makers have a twofold strategy: They support separate sport clubs and stimulate mainstream sport clubs to improve accessibility for minority groups (like ethnic minorities/immigrants and gays and lesbians). This can be seen as a success, it strengthens separate sport groups and people have the freedom of choice where to go (EGLSF 1999). The Homosport Netherlands foundation (GISAH) has become an official member of the Dutch Olympic Committee and the National Sports Federation (NOC\*NSF) in 2002. The Netherlands Cultural Sportfederation (NCS) is the sole national mainstream sport organisation that officially affiliated, in 1996, with the EGLSF. In an European context these efforts can be seen as a success but discrimination has not been extinguished yet.

### 1.8.2 Germany

The different local gay and lesbian organisations with the highest number of members in Germany are sport clubs. Most of the clubs are part of the relevant mainstream sport associations. In some sports there have been problems reported in being accepted as a gay and lesbian club (dancing, figure skating, track and field). Especially in bigger cities the integration of sport clubs is good, teams participate in regular leagues, tournaments and EuroGames are supported by the local authorities. In eastern Germany there are gay and lesbian teams who do not want to participate in regular leagues because of players who do not want to come out. Also in Germany only a very few professional sportspeople come out which is a proof that the risks to be discriminated are estimated high.

There are a few studies about different aspects of homosexuality and sports in Germany but these studies are not especially about homophobia (Palzkill 1990, Pfister 1999, Papagorgiou/Boge 1997, Fechtig 1995). Research about women and sports has been established in Germany in the last decades, in some of these studies the situation of lesbians has been reported as one aspect of the difficulties women face in sports (Pfister 1999, Palzkill 1990, Fechtig 1995). There is one single work about the situation of gay men in Volleyball (Papagorgiou/Boge 1997).

### 1.8.3 Italy

No studies about homophobia in sports could be found. No Italian sportswoman or sportsman has come out to the public so far. There is no information about homophobia in mainstream sport in Italy but the social situation could be taken as a reference point. The influence of the catholic church is very high in Italy. Especially in Rome the physical presence of the Vatican puts serious limitations on the local development of gay and lesbian activity. Gays and lesbians are accepted as long as they do not speak about their homosexuality and keep it as a private matter. It can be assumed that this is also the fact in sport clubs. Not talking about homosexuality and dealing with it as a private matter can be seen as the strategy of silence, one form of homophobia. Because of the social situation only a few gay and lesbian sport groups and clubs in Italy have been founded. Most of them are located in and around Milan, only one club could be established in Rome. All over Italy only one lesbian sports club exists, the participation of women in mixed clubs is very low. The clubs report discrimination of the different national sports federations. They act as if homosexuality does not exist (EGLSF 1999).

### 1.8.4 France

No studies about homophobia in sports could be found. Most of the gay and lesbian sport clubs in France are located in Paris, most of the groups in the province are hiking and outdoor sports groups and do not perform competition sport. Clubs participate in tournaments of regular clubs and problems of discrimination have been reported in contact sports. The gay and lesbian swim club in Paris is very successful within the French national Swim Federation and therefore they can “afford” to show their homosexuality in the public (EGLSF 1999).

### 1.8.5 Czech Republic

No studies about homophobia in sports could be found. Sport groups exist within the gay community, gay people are doing sport together unofficially. Several gay organisations (often student organisations) sponsor sport activities like bowling tournaments, disco dance etc.). In the last years Czech sport groups have got invitations to tournaments abroad, which helps to establish sport groups because of the inspiration people get from the experience of gay and lesbian tournaments. The participation is only possible with financial support of the inviting club (EGLSF 1999).

### 1.8.6 Norway/Sweden/Denmark

In Norway and Sweden the situation of women in top level sport has been researched so far (Kolnes 1995, Fasting 2003, Brus 2003). Kolnes and Fasting found out, that there is discrimination in top level women sport in Norway and Sweden, especially in football (Kolnes 1995, Fasting 2003). In Denmark Anne Brus found out, that there is discrimination in women's handball because of the great popularity of handball in Denmark (Brus 2003).

## 2 Respect, safety and accessibility for all in sport

On the European level two representative bodies set rules and guidelines that in principle affect us all. Rules that safeguard our human rights and rules that prohibit discriminatory barriers to access goods and services, including sport. These European authorities are the Council of Europe and the European Union.

For sport and for combating discrimination on sexual orientation two sets of rules are of chief importance. The first set is the European Union article 13 of the EU-treaty and the new European constitution: the 'European Convention' and applies to the 25 member states (in 2004). The other set of rules consists of: the European Sport Charter and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This set applies to the currently 45 member states within the Council of Europe.

The following chapters gives us a closer look in the area of sport from the Human Rights perspective and from the perspective of the free movement of people and accessibility to goods and services within Europe.

### 2.1 European Union: article 13 EU-Treaty and the European Constitution

The EU with its 25 member-countries have to comply with article 13 and in particular with the framework directive [2000/78/EC; 27 November 2000] on discrimination on all grounds in employment and occupation.

*article 13:*

*"The Council (of Ministers), acting unanimously on a proposal from the (European) Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation."*

As a consequence each EU member state has to translate the Council' decisions and guidelines into its own national legislation. Sport is one of the areas where freedom of access to goods and services is to be guaranteed without discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation, and other grounds. This makes equal treatment for gays and lesbians compulsory.

Moreover the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, article 21, clearly states:

*“Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex... or sexual orientation shall be prohibited”.*

To facilitate the process of anti-discrimination in the European countries a special anti-discrimination program is executed by the European Commission. The EGLSF participates in this Action program by taking part in the Football Against Racism Europe (FARE) network and special designated FARE-project. With this special FARE-project activities are organised for awareness raising and combating all forms of discrimination in sport.

Moreover a special Expert Group on the situation of gays and lesbians in European member states is to report, in 2004, to the European Commission about the status in each European country.

Only recently the above mentioned Article 13 has been included in the new articles II-21 and III-8 of the new European Constitution (adopted at the European Convention 13 June and 10 July 2003).

## **2.2 Council of Europe and the ECHR**

The position of gays, lesbians and bisexuals needs to be improved and safeguarded not only for a free and unbiased access for gays, lesbians and bisexuals in sport related goods and services but also from a human rights point of view. On the Human Rights the Council of Europe plays a major role. In particular the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) forbids discrimination against gays, lesbians and bisexuals in the 45 European countries that acknowledged and ratified the Convention.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has confirmed that Protocol 12 of this ECHR includes protection against sexual orientation discrimination. However not all Council of Europe member states have signed and ratified this important protocol 12 yet.

The Court of Human Rights confirmed in 1999 that sexual orientation was a prohibited ground of discrimination in the exercise of all the rights conferred by the ECHR.

Moreover the official European Sports Charter states amongst others, that participation to sport should be open to all Europeans.

As a pan-European Non Governmental Organisation the European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF) takes an active stand against discrimination and homophobia in sports. For its lobby work the EGLSF needed to acquire the consultative status of the Council of Europe. This official status was granted by January 2001. Enjoying this official status makes EGLSF with the European Non Governmental Sport Organisation (ENGSO) the only two official international Sport NGO's that work within the Council of Europe. The same applies for its advocacy work. EGLSF together with the International Lesbian and Gay Association Europe (ILGA) are the only two INGO's that work for the interest of gays, lesbians and bisexuals in the area of human rights.

EGLSF lobbies for recognition and visibility of gays, lesbians and bisexuals in sport. It successfully lobbied for including sport and education as important areas where awareness raising measures need to be taken in respect to non-discrimination of gays, lesbians and bisexuals<sup>1</sup>. On the Round Table Conference in Cyprus, May 2001, 'sexual orientation' was successfully included as one of the grounds of discrimination in sport.

Not only the above mentioned forms of recognition got the attention of the Parliamentary Assembly. Also EGLSF-lobby for a motion for a recommendation about the problematic situation of (young) gays and lesbians in sport, was successfully brought on the table, thanks to the support of 41 MP's. The former Sports Minister of the United Kingdom and current Member of British Parliament and Chair of the Council of Europe's parliamentary subcommittee on Sports, Mr. Tony Banks is the official 'Rapporteur' to the Council of Europe on this motion for recommendation. Moreover the official European Sports Charter states amongst others, that participation to sport should be open to all.

### ***Full text of motion for a recommendation***

*Situation of lesbians and gays in sports in member states  
Doc. 9357; 4 February 2002*

*presented by Ms. Ans Zwerver and others*

1. *Recent studies show that (young) gays and lesbians in Council of Europe member states are at a disadvantage when it comes to their participation in sports activities in their regular local sports organisation or in sport at school.*
2. *This fact is regrettable given the aims of the European Sports Charter, in particular Articles 1 and 4 respectively on participation and on non-discrimination.*
3. *The Assembly recalls that, on 30 May 2000 in Bratislava, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Walter Schwimmer, on the occasion of the informal 9th Conference of European Ministers*

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation nr 1474, September 2001 on the situation of lesbians and gays in Council of Europe member states.

*responsible for Sport, declared that “sport is a key factor in social integration”.*

*4. The Assembly also recalls that, on 27 April 2001, in Nicosia, discrimination based on sexual orientation is included in the Final Statement on Sport, Tolerance and Fair Play, adopted on the occasion of the 3rd Round Table on Sport, Tolerance and Fair Play.*

*5. On 26 September 2000 the Assembly adopted Recommendation 1474 (2000) on the situation of lesbians and gays in Council of Europe member states. Amongst other recommendations the member states are called upon to take positive measures to combat homophobic attitudes, including in sports (paragraph 11).*

*6. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers ask the Steering Committee and the committee of experts concerned to conduct a survey on existing research studies (as according to Article 11 of the European Sports Charter) and also on existing good practices within this field in member states.*

The EGLSF contributed as expert-organisation to the report. (See also chapter 3.1)

An the moment of the producing of this brochure, the report is in the process of being made and has to be debated and voted upon by the Parliamentary Assembly. When the Report and its recommendations will be adopted, the Committee of Ministers is to conclude on the recommendations.

In its work within the CoE the EGLSF continues its lobby for safety and respect for gays, lesbians and bisexuals in society in general and in sport in particular.

### **3 What needs to be done in the Europe of sport?**

#### ***3.1 Safeguarding human rights for gays and lesbians in sport, within the Council of Europe***

Before presenting a list of necessary policy measures, some conclusions on the situation for gay, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders in sport can be drawn:

- i. As in Chapter 1 reported there is only little research done in the area of homophobia and sports. Especially in southern and eastern countries studies are completely missing, in central and northern European countries studies are covering only a few sports and are situated in very limited regional contexts. But from the limited research in the area of sport discrimination and harassment of gays and lesbians is reported.
- ii. Sport is no exception to society at large when it reflects discrimination of gays & lesbians as well as homophobia.
- iii. The most common form of discrimination is silence and invisibility, which leads to the stabilisation of an extremely heterosexual



environment in sports. There seems to be a persistent silence on the issue of gays and lesbians in sports amongst sport authorities, although a very few exceptions can be reported. Most regular sport organisations seem to be ignorant on homophobia and discrimination of gays and lesbians in sport.

- iv. Hardly any professional sports people in any sport come out as being gay during their active sports career. That shows that they fear of discrimination is very high.
- v. Young gays & lesbians stay in the closet in their sport club, or at the gym at school. When their participation is on a voluntary basis, then especially gay youngsters drop out from sport, because of the gay, lesbian and bisexual unfriendly atmosphere. Being gay and being good at sports seems to exclude each other.
- vi. Homophobic chanting and anti-gay slurs occur frequently in sport, and in particular in popular sports like football. The very few pilot projects in football have not been successful (yet)<sup>2</sup>. And only recently the English Football Association has announced a campaign combating homophobia. However it seems that in other branches of sport pilot projects have shown a little success (swimming, volleyball and non-competitive or more recreational sports)<sup>3</sup>.
- vii. As an answer to mechanisms of social exclusion and for reasons of self determination gays and lesbians start their own sport clubs in a number of European countries. In some member states this development is acknowledged or even officially supported by sport authorities. (see also paragraph 4.1)
- viii. Only very few governments in the member states included gay sport in a recent policy document and/or just started developing a policy on the area of homophobia and discrimination on sexual orientation in sport.

Given this broad picture of the situation of gays and lesbians in sport, the EGLSF wants the following policy measures to be taken, by the following authorities within the Council of Europe and its member-states:

**The Committee of Ministers should:**

- i Extend the grounds listed in article 4 of the European Sports Charter with discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation,
- ii Add homophobia and discrimination in sport and education to the tracks of the 2004 Informal meeting of Sports Ministers Conference,
- iii Call upon the National Ambassadors for sport, tolerance and fair play to include this element in their mission and

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<sup>2</sup> the Netherlands: (I) KNVB-afdeling west en ABD-NHN-project 2000 and (II) the Diopter pilot GISAH-NCS-NOC\*NSF project 2000, Germany: Tatort Fußball, Germany-BAFF-project.

<sup>3</sup> EGLSF statistic survey 1999: many gay and lesbian volleyball players and swimmers in Germany and the Netherlands affiliate with the regular national or regional sport association.

- iv. Investigate the possibility of bringing the issue of homophobia to the European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sport Events.
- v. Call upon member states:
  - a. to launch active campaigns against homophobia or broaden existing/current campaigns in sport against xenophobia and include homophobia;
  - b. to include homophobia and the abusive language to gays and lesbians to the grounds of discrimination and harassment on sexual orientation.
  - c. to ban homophobic chanting and other homophobic abuse, like it is already being or should be done for xenophobic and racist forms of discrimination in sport; and include homophobic chanting to the grounds of criminal offence, just like racist chanting at or around sport events;
  - d. to involve national unions of football players and other NGO's, if existing: from the gay and lesbian community, in their campaigns and in all other necessary confidence building steps;
- vi. Call upon pan-European sport organizations:
  - a. to take up homophobic chanting and other homophobic abuse as an offence against its constitution, as it is already being done for xenophobic and racist chanting and other abuses;
  - b. in particular to the UEFA, to adapt its 'ten point plan for professional football clubs' by including homophobia in it and involve other NGO's into this;
  - c. to adopt or adapt practical guidelines for professional sport clubs against discrimination, including racism, xenophobia, gender and homophobia;

### **3.2 Research**

Moreover more research on the situation of gay, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders in sports is necessary to deepen the knowledge about the mechanisms of homophobia as well as to get more information about homophobia in different sports in different countries. Therefore the EGLSF calls upon the **Committee of Ministers** and the **national Sport Ministers** to take the following steps:

- i. Research should be supported in professional sport as well as in mainstream sport.
- ii. Different research methods should be applied. Professional athletes are very difficult to research because most of them are not open about their homosexuality. Therefore more qualitative methods could be appropriate to get information. In addition especially in mainstream sports quantitative investigations can provide new findings.

- iii. Nationwide as well as comparative studies should be supported to get information about the situation in single countries as well as to see the differences between countries.
- iv. In some sports homophobia has never been researched. Therefore research is necessary to see the structures in different sports and to know about the mechanisms of homophobia and other forms of discrimination in single sports.
- v. Official support of Sport events like EuroGames could be an appropriate possibility to reach out to athletes from different European countries and different sports and make it also a matter of public debate.

### ***3.3 A free and unbiased access to sport services, within the European Union***

Currently the EGLSF participates as one of the partners in the Football Against Racism Europe-network. Thanks to the European Community's Action Programme against discrimination, FARE is running a two year project that focuses on the combat of racism, xenophobia, sexism and homophobia in sports and in football in particular.

It is realistic to assume that the anti-discriminatory goals of the European Community Action Programme can not be met in just a few years time.

Given the complexity and the differences within Europe, the following policy measures should be taken by the **European Commission** (and/or by the authorities in the 25 member states):

- i. The Action Programme's term should be extended, before its initial term 2001- 2006 comes to an end.
- ii. Like ILGA-Europe<sup>4</sup>, EGLSF pleads for extending the current Framework Directive to all other areas besides (discrimination in the area of) employment and occupation only. However the current Directive applies to the professional sport sector.
- iii. In addition to the European Directives and national laws, EGLSF wants other policy instruments to be introduced and used in combating discrimination in sport (and other areas of society), because laws are just not enough and need to be embedded and broadened in society. Improving current instruments like the Euro Barometer and using methods like the so called 'Open Coordination' in this area.

But also national governments have a responsibility to implement, embed and deepen their non-discriminatory laws and regulations in sport and other areas in society.

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<sup>4</sup> "After the Framework Directive: Combating discrimination outside employment", ILGA-Europe Policy Paper, April 2002, Mark Bell, University of Leicester.

NGO's can play an important role in the area of sport and in the area of anti-discrimination. However empowerment of gay, lesbian and bisexuals in sport is vital for embedding the equal and unbiased treatment of gay, lesbian and bisexuals in sport, other instruments like monitoring, research, expert centres or other specialised bodies, could be beneficial to a policy of non-discrimination within sport.

The EGLSF and its European network of local and national sport NGO's will follow the developments in the European countries carefully.

For **European and national sport organisations**, EGLSF calls for:

- i. Self regulating instruments like a code of conduct and public campaigns to make the law(s) become more effective (see also chapter 3.3).

To the knowledge of EGLSF, only very few national sport authorities in Europe have included all grounds of discrimination (article 13) among them freedom of sexual orientation in their Sport Code of Conduct<sup>5</sup>. In the following paragraph guidelines are presented for sport clubs and sport organisations. These kinds of instruments could enhance the quality and the performance of the sport sector.

### ***3.4. Guidelines to combat homophobia and discrimination on sexual orientation in daily life sport and within sport organisations***

**National and European Sport organisations** should develop an anti-discrimination policy<sup>6</sup>:

- i. Such a policy should be designed to: (a) eliminate discrimination, homophobia and harassment, (b) ensure equal treatment and should cover all aspects of the sport, including: team selection, coaching and training, rules and codes of conduct (including officials and supporters), appointment of officials and managers, recruitment and membership conditions, administration and competition (e.g. licences)  
The policy should be adopted by the highest level within the sport organisation.
- ii. When applying the anti-discrimination policy, it is important to encourage the board and committees of regular sport organisations to take action against discrimination, harassment and homophobia. Also the publishing of such policies supports the implementation. Reviewing current codes of conduct; do they

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<sup>5</sup> The Netherlands: "Discrimination offside", Code of Conduct to prevent and fight discrimination in sport, 1994, Netherlands Olympic Committee & Netherlands Sport Confederation (NOC\*NSF).

<sup>6</sup> Australian Sports Commission, issued guidelines to address homophobia and discrimination on sexual orientation in sport, 2000. In this paragraph an abstract is presented, but also elements are added that apply to Europe (e.g.: 'what could governmental organizations do?').

- cover all grounds of discrimination? Monitor and evaluate the sport organisations policy performance. Is a handbook with guidelines made available?
- iii. An internal complaint mechanism should balance fairly the rights of the complainant and the alleged harasser. Not only formal but also informal options for resolution of complaints should be included.
  - iv. Public or organisational campaigns should raise the awareness amongst the public and athletes/sportsmen and sportswomen about the importance of equal treatment and non-discrimination. Such awareness raising campaigns could have many forms. From internal panels, discussion groups, or thematic meetings, to training sessions for professionals.
  - v. Also small or symbolic steps could be helpful to underline the significance of taking a stand against discrimination, homophobia and harassment. For example publishing human interest articles in the organisations or club magazine (e.g. personal testimonies), by participating at gay/lesbian sport events like EuroGames, by supporting the work of EGLSF, by affiliating with this pan-European federation.

Not only sport organisations but also **governmental (sport) organisations** could act to stop discrimination, homophobia and harassment in sport. Therefore governmental (sport) organisations should take the following measures:

- i. Implementing the European ‘Directive against (sexual) harassment’, national governments have to include harassment on the ground of sexual orientation when designing their policy and translating this Directive into national law.
- ii. Moreover national governments could support regular sport organisations, specialised bodies and advocacy organisations to raise the awareness amongst the world of sport on this fundamental anti-discrimination principles.

Not only national and European sport organisations should develop an anti-discrimination policy which includes homophobia, but **also individual men and women** can act to stop discrimination, homophobia and harassment in sport. For example by using language that does not assume all coaches or players are of the same sexual orientation, or by treating all athletes, coaches, officials fairly and respectfully regardless of their gender and sexual orientation. Professional players should take a stand, being role models for the public, against discrimination. For coaches, trainers, officials the following guidelines<sup>7</sup> could be introduced:

- i. Recognize that lesbian and gay athletes exist. Don’t assume that everyone on your team is ‘straight’.

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<sup>7</sup> Excerpt from ‘Some tips for coaches’; Alter – training and consulting on diversity issues; Bologna, Italy.

- ii. Never use abusive language or words that easily can be perceived as such, to demean anyone. Speak neutrally about gay, lesbian and bisexuals.
- iii. Deal decisively with anti-gay slurs and actions, as you do not permit bias based on race and ethnicity.
- iv. Do not fear reprimanding a player for anti-gay prejudice; coaches are in a unique position to teach about social justice and diversity. Most athletes want to respect their coaches for being good, respectful people - and those that don't, need role models who are.
- v. Understand that gay, lesbian and bisexuals are everywhere. If they're not on your team, they're among the men and women who provide you with medical services, write about your games, clean your uniforms and locker rooms, etcetera.
- vi. Remember that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is natural. Despite popular myth, sexuality is an orientation, not a choice.

This paragraph completes the list of policy measures that EGLSF would like to be on the agenda of the various 'players' in the Europe of sport.

## **4 European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF)**

### **4.1 About EGLSF**

The European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF) was founded in 1989 in The Hague, The Netherlands. The EGLSF was founded by sport groups from The Hague (The Netherlands), Berlin, Frankfurt and Bonn (Germany), Zurich (Switzerland), Brussels (Belgium) and Paris (France). The EGLSF is an umbrella organisation of gay and lesbian sport groups in Europe. By the Annual Meeting of the EGLSF in March 2003, the EGLSF has about 100 member groups from 14 European countries. The EGLSF has local and national member organisations in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The EGLSF represents about 40,000 gay and lesbian athletes in Europe.

As a non governmental umbrella organisation the EGLSF spreads information on gay and lesbian sports in Europe. The information is spread by a newsletter, mailing lists and by a very popular website [www.gaysport.info](http://www.gaysport.info). The website contains information on the EGLSF and its members, the tournament calendar and further interesting news and addresses on gay and lesbian sports and a place to find friends to do sports with.

The EGLSF is the licence holder of EuroGames. EuroGames are the European Gay and Lesbian Multi-sports Championships. EuroGames include two days of sports and culture with an opening and a closing

event. In years when there are no Gay Games organised a member of the EGLSF hosts the EuroGames. The EuroGames were first held in The Hague in 1992.

EuroGames history:

1992	The Hague	The Netherlands	300 participants
1993	The Hague	The Netherlands	540 participants
1995	Frankfurt	Germany	2,000 participants
1996	Berlin	Germany	3,400 participants
1997	Paris	France	2,000 participants
2000	Zurich	Switzerland	4,300 participants
2001	Hanover	Germany	1,600 participants
2003	Copenhagen	Denmark	2,200 participants
2004	Munich	Germany	5,000 participants estimated

Since 2001 a difference has been made between the so called smaller and bigger EuroGames. With smaller EuroGames the number of sports and participants is limited. In 2001 they were hosted in Hanover for the first time. In 2003 EuroGames VIII were hosted for the first time in Denmark. Pan Idræt Copenhagen was the host of these EuroGames. In 2004 Munich will host EuroGames IX, so called big EuroGames with 27 sports and 5,000 athletes are estimated to participate. Everything about EuroGames can be found at [www.eurogames.info](http://www.eurogames.info). The EGLSF is a member of the Federation of Gay Games to represent the interest of the European athletes.

EGLSF is also a Pan European advocate of gay and lesbian athletes. Since 2001 the EGLSF has been given consultative status by the Council of Europe. The EGLSF is monitoring the situation of gays and lesbians in sport in Europe. Since 2002 the EGLSF is working in an anti discrimination program of the European Union. The EGLSF is working here together with other anti discrimination organisations in sports, mainly football. The goal is to improve the situation of gays and lesbians in the regular sport.

#### ***4.2 Partners of the EGLSF***

Since 2002 the EGLSF is working together with eight NGOs in the field of anti-discrimination in football. These organisations are combined in the Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) network. Since its establishment in 1999 the FARE network has been campaigning for the right of every individual to participate at all levels of football free of racism, discrimination and harassment, and to encourage national football associations, football governing bodies, clubs, fans and the media to combat racism and discrimination pro-actively. FARE has also

been concerned to ensure that the popularity and the integrative power of the game is used to raise awareness about racism and related forms of discrimination in society at large. The co-ordination of the European Union Anti Discrimination Action Programme is done by FairPlay-vidc in Vienna, Austria. The following groups are participating in the partnership:

- The Vienna Institute for Development and Cooperation (VIDC)/Fairplay, Austria: The “*FairPlay. Different Colours. One Game*” campaign was launched by the vidc in 1997 within the framework of the European Union Year Against Racism. The objective of this intercultural sports project is to use the popularity and integrative power of football to fight racism and other forms of discrimination by means of pro-active methods. The FairPlay team carries out joint activities with football clubs, fan groups, migrant organisations and schools. Within these activities FairPlay emphasises the unequal relationships between European and African soccer. FairPlay-vidc sets up a week of action against discrimination in football every year, the so-called FARE Action Week. ([www.fairplay.or.at](http://www.fairplay.or.at))
- Buendnis Aktiver Fussballfans e.V. (BAFF), Germany: BAFF is a national association of football fans founded in 1993, currently more than 50 fan clubs, fan projects and fanzines are members of BAFF. BAFF was involved in the running of fan-embassies during the European Championships 1996 and 2000. As part of the network BAFF produced the touring exhibition “Scene of the Crime Stadium: Racism and Discrimination in Football”, kicked off in Berlin in November 2001. Since then the exhibition toured to several German cities where more than 20.000 people, many of them teenagers, have been visiting the exhibition. Accompanied by panel discussions, readings and musical events the visitors had the possibility to discuss the local situation with the organisers. ([www.tatort-stadion.de](http://www.tatort-stadion.de))
- Football Unites Racism Divides (FURD), United Kingdom: The project was started in 1995 by a group of Sheffield United fans who were concerned about a number of incidents of racist abuse both in and around the stadium, which is situated in a community where about 44% of the local youth population is black or Asian. Their aim is to ensure that everyone who plays or watches football can do so without fear of racial abuse and harassment, in either a verbal or a physical form, and to increase the participation of people from ethnic minorities in football, especially at Sheffield United, as either players, spectators or employees. As a part of FARE FURD is running the website [www.farenet.org](http://www.farenet.org).
- Kick it Out (KIO), United Kingdom: The campaign was launched in 1993. It proved hugely popular and through a succession of high profile launches and activities began to get across the message of anti-racism in football. In 1997 KIO was established as an independent organisation to take up the role of furthering the objectives of highlighting and



campaigning against racism in football at all levels. Within FARE KIO took over the lobbying of governing bodies. The office is located in London.

- **Never Again, Poland:** The 'Let's Kick Racism Out Of The Stadiums' campaign of the Polish FARE member 'Never Again' Association promotes anti-racism and anti-Semitism at football grounds and aims at removing racist and chauvinist attitudes prevalent amongst Polish fans. Activities include regular monitoring and reporting of incidences, production of two anti-racist magazines ('Stadion' and 'Never Again' magazine) and the organisation of an antiracist football tournament.
- **Progetto Ultrà - UISP Emilia Romagna, Italy:** Progetto Ultrà is a project that works with Italian football fans (Ultràs) and is based in Bologna, Emilia Romagna. It is part of Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti, one of the biggest sport organisations in Italy. Progetto Ultrà runs an Information and Documentation Centre on racism, discrimination and violence in football. The results are published on the FARE website. For the European Monitoring Centre Progetto Ultrà has done a research on racism on football websites. Every Year Progetto Ultrà organises for FARE the Mondiali Antirazzisti. The Mondiali is a non-competitive multicultural mini football tournament that boasts an unique atmosphere. In 2003 a record of 164 teams and some 4000 people sampled the Mondiali experience. For the 8th edition in July 2004 even more participants are expected.
- **Show Racism the Red Card (SRTRC), United Kingdom:** SRTRC is an anti-racist campaign established in Newcastle in 1997 and produces videos, CD-ROMs and magazines with statements of professional footballers. SRTRC is doing workshops in schools and youth projects and organises each year several launches of its posters at football clubs. For FARE SRTRC is running an anti-racist school competition in the Republic of Ireland.
- **Unione Italiana Sport per Tutti (UISP), Italy:** UISP is one of the biggest sports organisations in Italy based in Rome and has more than one million members. For FARE UISP takes over the duties of reporting, organisation of meetings of the core partners, administrative help to Progetto Ultrà and public relations in Italy.

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