

THE EUROPEAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE ON THE MOVE: SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Hosted by the Portugal Paralympic Committee in Lisbon, the European Paralympic Family gathered on the 2nd and 3rd of October 2015 for its 11th General Assembly & Conference.

John Petersson, President of the European Paralympic Committee, was pleased being able to welcome representatives from 29 National Paralympic Committees, four European branches of international para-sports federations, and a variety of national and international guest organisations.

The event entitled *The European Paralympic Committee on the Move: Shaping the Future Together* was excellently run by the local host under the leadership of its President Humberto Santos. One of the highlights of the event was the Gala Dinner with a traditional Fado Concert organised in the heart of Lisbon.

The biennial gathering of the European Paralympic family was divided into two parts; a both informing and engaging Conference Day, and the General Assembly, the supreme governing body of EPC that is held every two years.

EPC AT A HEALTHY PULSE

The EPC Conference had the aim to draw a bow from where EPC came, where EPC is now, and where the membership wants EPC to go.

John Petersson highlighted that 2008 to 2011 marked a period of consolidation for EPC in all areas, where *"The health of the EPC was extremely weak"*. The years 2011 to 2013, however, were creating new pulse for EPC. *"Due to the hard and diligent work of all involved, the health of the EPC family progressed"* said the EPC President. The period from 2013 to 2015 allowed for consistency with sustained stability: *"Due to the activity of the EPC and its members, we are now in a healthy position and the European Paralympic pulse is as strong as it has ever been: But work is needed to maintain this health"*.

EPC FIELDS OF DEVELOPMENT

The Conference Day was divided into two parts; a morning session with information about the work successfully implemented by EPC with and for its members, and an afternoon session dedicated to the exploration of steps towards the future development of the organisation.

The reports from EPC development fields were about how EPC seeks to *Empower Individuals*, to *Support Organisations through Collaboration*, and to *Prepare Pathways to Excellence*.

The members were informed by the Executive Board about: The success of EPC's 2015 European Para Youth Games; The collaboration established by EPC to allow European para-athletes to participate at the 2016 European University Games; The introduction of a specific MBA Scholarship Programme for young European para-athletes; The success story of the EPC Youth Ambassadors Programme co-funded by the AGITOS Foundation; EPC's support to members through a Mobility Programme established with support from the European Union; and the activities of EPC's women in sport committee. The reporting part concluded with presentations from national para-sport representatives showcasing good practices from Portugal.



EPC EMPOWERS YOUTH

John Petersson said: *“One of our current priorities is the development of pathways for young athletes, both inside and outside sports.”*

Therefore, EPC paid special attention to young athletes also during its Conference and provided them with opportunities to speak and directly involve with its membership. Vladyslava Kravchenko (Malta / Para-Swimming) and Daniel Caverzaschi (Spain / Wheelchair-Tennis), for example, gave inspiring presentations on how they see the Movements' perspectives but also their own ambition to contribute to this.

Vladyslava and Daniel participated in the YAMBA Programme that focuses on developing EPC Youth Ambassadors for the Paralympic Movement in Europe, who will have the skills to become leaders and to promote the Movement amongst their peer group. Both are currently training hard towards their way to Rio 2016.

SHAPING EPC's FUTURE TOGETHER

“The fast development of the Paralympic Movement and changes in internal and external relationships of the EPC make it necessary for us to evaluate and constantly review our activities and strategy” said President Petersson. *“In order to continue developing our profile and to support stepwise growth with the inclusion of our members' needs and wishes, we developed a short workshop to capture the current range of opinions on selected development aspects and options.”*

In a lively and interactive workshop, the EPC members were encouraged to position themselves and discuss the further strategic positioning of EPC between the poles of acting as a sport political representative and Paralympic advocate on the one hand, and a driver for the development of sports on the other.

The workshop aimed at setting priorities and giving indications on the use of EPC's resources. It animated the membership to exchange around fundamental questions related to the overall development of the Paralympic movement; including questions of Olympic-Paralympic-cooperation strategies or the implications of the mainstreaming of sports.

EPC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The 11TH EPC General Assembly took place on the 3RD of October. The activity report and financial report presented by the EPC President were supported and adopted by the membership. With ParaVolley Europe, a new EPC member was adopted. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the European Women and Sport (EWS) network. As an outcome of the development of closer relations with the European Olympic Committee, relationship of the EPC athletes' representative with the EOC Athletes Committee was announced.

Outcomes of discussions included that EPC will establish a working group regarding the development of envisaged European Para Youth Games 2017, with a clear bid process to be established. Furthermore, an increase of the EPC membership fee with effect from 2016 was adopted, a working group on EPC collaboration structures under the leadership of NPC Ireland will be established, and a letter to IPC from the EPC General Assembly related to the use of the last sport slot for the 2020 Paralympic Games was agreed.



CONCLUSIONS

“The discussions during the two days were lively, and especially the development workshop, both as a tool itself and as regards its outcomes, was very positively received by the EPC membership, with all representatives actively engaged in it” concluded John Petersson, who directly shared his observations with the audience at the end of the Conference Day.

The EPC Executive Board will now duly discuss all outcomes of the Conference and General Assembly 2015 and develop a strategic Position Paper that will be shared and discussed with the full EPC membership. With it, it is the EPC's aim to *“listen to its members”* and to steadily improve its management and governance processes, in order *“to maximise EPC's pulse, with a more engaged and proactive membership”*.

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

The EUROPEAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE (EPC) is composed of forty-nine National Paralympic Committees and the European branches of five disability-specific International Organisations of Sports for the Disabled. EPC's mission is to promote and contribute to the development of sport opportunities and competitions for European athletes with a disability as part of the world-wide Paralympic Movement. It ensures the growth and strength of the Paralympic Movement through the development of the European National Paralympic Committees and (as an ambassador) supports the activities and reflects on the needs of all EPC members.



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