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## MINUTES TO THE 24<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE MEN'S EHF NATIONS BOARD (NB)

*(Parallel to the meeting of the EHLB and preceding the meeting of the PHB)*

**Date:** Tuesday, 9 March 2021  
**Time:** 10:45 – 13:30  
**Venue:** Video Conference via MS Teams

**Participants:**

Morten Stig Christensen	Chairman / DEN
Philippe Bana	Vice Chairman / FRA
Mark Schober	Member / GER
Marek Góralczyk	Member / POL
Ingo Meckes	Member / SUI
Stephen Neilson	Member / GBR

**EHF Office:**

Martin Hausleitner	Secretary General
Peter Sichelschmidt	Senior Director National Team Competitions
Marsha Brown	Corporate Liaison / Minutes

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*[Edit: due to technical difficulties, Member Góralczyk was unable to provide immediate feedback to the topics but was present for the duration of the meeting.]*

### 1. Welcome and Introduction

Chairman Christensen welcomed the participants to the final meeting of the Nations' Board in its current form and would reflect that in the closing words.

#### 1.1. Current Situation

#### 1.2. Overall Picture October 2020 – February 2021

#### 1.3. Preview

Regarding the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Chairman provided the opportunity for the members to describe the current situation (per Dato) in their respective countries; for brevity, the commonalities of the situation were summarised and included the ongoing travel restrictions, different restrictions applying to different countries, quarantine measures, the upcoming OG Qualification Tournaments, the financial impact on clubs and federations, as well as the emotional and psychological impact:

**Bana (FRA):** the situation is not worse but remains at a critical point and has implemented restrictions for persons from non-EU countries. Indoor sports are still on hold. FRA estimates more than 100k players were lost. Bana spoke of the FFHB strategy with the objective of restarting on 1 May; the plan focuses on both the outdoor and grassroots branches of the sport covering a three-month period. This will include significant financial support (FFHB/FRA Govt.). Though it remains uncertain as to what will happen in the future, FRA wants to have all players back in the game by September 2021. An obligatory (PCR) test regime is in place in order to play.

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**Meckes (SUI):** the situation is stable; restrictions have been eased and junior teams can train normally. Top sport has been exempted from the quarantine measures and those teams travelling to SUI can remain for a maximum of 5 days. However, the concern remains that the situation will worsen, and the activities will be stopped again. Top divisions are allowed to play without spectators. A test regime is in place, but it is not obligatory.

**Neilson (SCO):** the country remains under a full lockdown; thus, there has been no handball played for over a year. It is expected that the youth teams (U18) can train resp. play by the end of April. However, senior players hope to play again in September, but it could be that it may not happen in 2021. Federation activities are centred around outdoor activities. It was noted that players are allowed to train in England. Neilson noted that 25 million persons are vaccinated in the UK and the new case numbers are decreasing; it is hoped that the vaccination will accelerate the return of sport.

**Schober (GER):** the Bundesliga continues to play, and bi-weekly testing is obligatory. The 3<sup>rd</sup> division will restart in part. Government assistance is being offered to clubs. All other mid-ranked teams have ceased activity. Outdoor training is allowed for the U14. A concept to get players back to training within the next two months is developed. The DHB is gearing up in stages working in two-week increments. The challenge remains the varying conditions in the different regions. The key topic, also on a political level, is bringing back youth sport due to the impact on the players. DHB has also recorded a drop in players especially in the U10 and over 40s.

**Christensen (DEN):** Matches at the top level are continuing without spectators; players in the 1<sup>st</sup> division are tested on a weekly basis; though DHF is currently not pushing for all matches to restart but is focusing on bringing the YAC sport back and street, grass, and beach handball. Christensen mentioned a study that concluded that young persons (U14) have gained an average of 8kg over the course of the pandemic; thus, there is great motivation to get them moving. It is expected that it could take up to 4-7 weeks of preparation before players can start playing matches again. DHF is working in cooperation with DSF to return to indoor play in groups of 10 (or smaller groups) using both halves of the court. DHF is looking forward to the summer camps as there is also a fear of losing members – so far, still a small, but noticeable number. The autumn period has been deemed crucial to see how many players will continue, and there is a large financial investment aimed at keeping the players in the sport and providing positive experiences with the outdoor handball activities aimed to bringing handball back to the communities.

## **2. Previous meetings – Minutes/Reports**

### *2.1. NB Meeting 10/2020*

With no additional comment, the minutes are adopted.

### *2.2. PHB Meeting 10/2020*

### *2.3. WHB/PHB Common Meeting 10/2020*

### *2.4. EXEC Meeting 12/2020*

With no additional comment, the NB took note of the minutes from the aforementioned meetings.

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## 2.5. Further Reports

No additional reports were furnished.

### 3. Men's National Team Competitions (20:00)

#### 3.1. Men's IHF World Championship EGY

Chairman Christensen mentioned the positive reports received concerning the event and praised the efforts of IHF representatives D. Späte and P. Strub, both who worked tirelessly to accommodate the teams. The 2021 Men's World Championship with 32 teams was hailed a success; the match schedule was appropriate, and the short Preliminary Round did not have weak games. It is hoped that the women's event in December can be held with spectators. The public response to the event was also mentioned, with more than 3 million viewers watching the final, new social media records, with the added bonus of avoiding consequences from partners. It was important to transmit two major events to the world, with more than 10 million viewers across various channels, as it provided a clear signal to the players, and the handball community; seeing the national team on TV was/is important.

#### 3.2. Olympic Games - Qualifications and Final Tournament

The NB members contemplated the challenges and unanswered questions faced due to this event i.e. scheduling, financial impact due to lack of financial support, test regimes, travel restrictions, and returning players back to their clubs as soon as possible. General concerns were also raised concerning the event hygiene protocol. In Germany, there is currently no more room for negotiation with the authorities; for teams entering Germany, if one member of a team tests positive, there is a high risk that the entire team is out of the competition. Persons from countries where a mutation of Covid-19 is present are ordered to quarantine. With similar situations present for other participating countries (e.g. FRA), the OG Qualification schedule was also commented as some teams have three consecutive matches.

It was stressed that at this point, positive cases in handball would be very bad for the sport and acknowledged that the situation is very complicated, as the chain of responsibility is unclear. It was reasoned, reflecting upon the situation in 12/2020, that many Federations resp. countries are suffering from the governmental restrictions, and it is clear that actions are not taken 'for' or 'against' a club, rather against governments that are not ready to enable handball competitions in line with provisions made for football. It was emphasised that many governments are supporting sport, but not all sports.

Turning to the Final tournament that is expected to be held as scheduled, the only information available is that which has been openly published; thus, the event is proceeding according to schedule and it is hoped that vaccinations are rolled out. It is not expected that athletes will be vaccinated as a priority; the event will conduct regular tests, but there will be a mandatory quarantine period upon arrival in Japan. The question of spectators from outside Japan is still unanswered. More information is expected in April.

#### 3.3. EHF EURO 2022 HUN/SVK – Status Update (Qualifications / Final Tournament)

A special situation surrounds the Qualifiers; during the 11/2020 playing period, only 18 out of 32 matches were conducted, and in the 01/2021 playing period, the situation improved with 17 out of 21 matches completed. In March, 20 matches are scheduled and in the last period in April, 35 matches are planned. Group 1 continued with 3 teams following the

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withdrawal of BEL, and there are three matches remaining in the last two rounds. In Group 3, the challenges concern FAR as there are no return flight connections from UKR; the possibility of a charter flight is being explored. The issue of no entry into Norway was resolved by scheduling both matches (NOR-LAT, LAT-NOR) to be played in Riga. The same issue arose surrounding entry into Israel; the matches (ISR-LTU, ISR-ISL) have been rescheduled.

Regarding the final tournament preparations are ongoing; this is underpinned through the close cooperation between the EHF and the organisers. The match schedule is defined, and ticket sales started in January and the process is going well with expected figures; the interest is clear, and people do expect that they will be in an arena in 2022. The onsite inspections have restarted and albeit that the organisation is slightly behind schedule the EHF has proven that 10 days can be enough to turn an event.

The organisers and the EHF continue to work on various promotional activities; the Final Tournament draw event is planned for 6 May with a workshop to be held on the fringes. The arena in Budapest is still under construction, though work continues through the pandemic. Adaptations to the event will be submitted to the Executive Committee for decision i.e. arrival of the teams two days prior to the start of the event; this would allow for extra testing if necessary, an opportunity to host more media events. This is also the first tournament under the new media and marketing agreement, this means there will be an increase in media and promotional activities and a wider offering of media content; media workshops to this end will be organised. The expectations for an outstanding tournament are high.

In response to a question from Member Ingo Meckes concerning compensation to cover financial losses as a result of the pandemic, it was stated that many requests have been received and the organisation is in the process of collating all requests, an evaluation process will follow where possible solutions will be discussed; in order to secure a transparent process, this matter will be dealt with upon conclusion of the competitions. It was reiterated that the EHF already distributed EUR 3.8 million in funds and materials to the Federations.

#### *3.4. Future EHF EURO Events - Status Update*

**Women's EHF EURO 2022 SMM:** preparations with the organisers began early; the draw event will take place on 25.03.2021. A record number of 36 teams have registered for the qualification stage, which shows the clear development of women's handball; this is the final event with 16 teams. The preliminary rounds are planned to take place in Skopje (MKD) and Podgorica (MNE); main round venues are yet to be confirmed, and the final weekend will take place in Ljubljana (SLO). The EHF EURO Cup, with the three host national teams and the reigning European champion, will take place parallel to the tough qualification

**Women's EHF EURO 2024 HSA:** the preparation has yet to start.

**Men's EHF EURO 2024 GER:** the organisation cooperation is excellent and the DHB are expected to announce the venues shortly. Together, the EHF and DHB have worked intensely on the match schedule and the opening match will be a showcase event in the Düsseldorf arena – a world record match – with 60 thousand spectators. The partners are already working on activating the tournament and an exciting promotion line is defined. Though the event is years away, much is happening at the organisational level.

**EHF EURO 2026 & 2028:** many Federations interested in hosting the next events, the deadline for all applications is May 2021; the events will be awarded at the Extraordinary EHF Congress to be held on the fringes of the EHF 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. The level of interest proves that the Federations are active and see the organisation of an EHF EURO as a positive factor in their development; strong tournaments can be expected.

The report was received positively by the Nations' Board; however, looking to future events, it was suggested that the imbalance (i.e. ticketing, marketing rights, etc.) between the EHF and the organiser be resolved. Despite the volume of interest, care needs to be taken to protect the rights of potential organisers, and this should be reflected in the bid books, as it could encourage more Federations to apply for events. As it stands now, it is proving difficult to earn money from the EHF EURO, which could mean that smaller Federations may not be able to apply to potentially host an event.

Efforts undertaken on the side of the EHF include offering additional financial support for women's events and increasing basic amounts and paying for venue dressing. It was clarified that the new system in place regarding ticketing see the EHF offering the system, but not the income, which still goes to the organiser. The new centralised system allows for a wider reach following both a local and international approach. Naturally, it is hope that a good balance is found for all future events; based on the new media and marketing agreement, monies received are also set to increase.

Member Schober voiced concern about information coming from the EHF regarding the new position for the floor stickers, stating that such marketing rights belong to the Federation, hence the discussion prior to any change should have been dealt with at the level of the Nations' Board before being passed to the National Federations. Hausleitner acknowledged that the rights belong to the organisations; however, the matter at hand was based on a small (change of angle) adjustment, and conceded that long-term changes are first to be discussed by the NB prior to being put before the National Federations.

### *3.5. EHF/IHF YAC Events 2021 (2020)*

Sichelschmidt opened the point by reminding the NB of the decisions taken by the IHF Council, this included the cancellation (following two postponements) of the Women's U20 (ROU) and U18 (CRO). Furthermore, the decision regarding the Men's IHF Superglobe is yet to be taken. The Men's U21 (HUN) and U19 (GRE) were also cancelled; subsequently, the corresponding European qualification tournaments for MU21 in ISR and the MU19 in AUT, in addition to the MU19 Q2022 planned for 11/2021, were cancelled by the EHF.

As a further consequence of the IHF Council decision, the IHF Emerging Nations' Championship is postponed until further notice. This, along with the withdrawal of GBR, impacted the Men's EHF EURO 2024 Qualification Phase 1. (BUL, GBR, CYP, GEO), as this was planned to be played in a tournament format in GEO. Following a reassessment of the situation by the EHF, it was decided to combine the Men's EHF EURO 2024 Qualification Phase 1 with an 'EHF Trophy' to be played in GEO from 14-20 June 2021 with a maximum of 9 teams.

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Following the postponement and eventual cancellation of all M20 competitions and the M18 EURO; the M18 (now M19) championships will take place as rescheduled in BUL, LAT, and MKD (08/2021).

Taking into consideration the decision of the IHF Council to cancel all YAC events in the summer; the EHF expeditiously decided to re-implement a M19 (former M18) EHF EURO taking place in CRO (08/2021 and parallel to the Championships) This decision enables this particular age category to have an event in the current competition cycle. For this event, the EHF returns to a 'normal' structure for a qualification e.g. from the event, the top 13 would be promoted to the M18/M20 EUROS in 2022 and the last three would go to the M18/M20 championships; also from this event, seven teams would also qualify to the EYOF 2022 (postponed from 2021).

With an IHF-EHF meeting scheduled to take place in March, the NB requested a global (EHF/IHF) visual of the current and future competition situation to be informed on, in order to understand all the options, and to be clear on what is foreseen and the consequences of the various postponements, cancellations, and rescheduling; the situation is convoluted and proves difficult for those taking care of the YAC teams within the Federations. In response, it was iterated that coordination at that level was difficult and the EHF can also be caught off-guard; currently more than 11 events are planned for summer 2021, a new hygiene concept was adapted to the National Team events especially targeting the matches that are to be played in the tournament format.

Adding to the discussion Member Schober provided an example of how the YAC event situation impacted on the Federation (change of age categories, re-strategizing, etc.), it was asked what is the role of the Nations' Board in such situations and if this YAC situation should have been discussed in the NB beforehand.

In response, it was acknowledged that when major decisions are on the table, that the NB serves as the correct platform for discussion. But it was stressed that due to the timing as well as the rapid developments, there was not enough time to send the issues to the Nations' Board. The complexity of the year was highlighted, and it is not the role of the NB to solve immediate crises, as under such changeable situations, the Executive Committee is responsible for such decisions. The NB agreed that the competence of the EHF was not in question; however, more communication would have been valuable in this situation.

### *3.6. Beach Handball*

As reported under AP1.2 in the minutes from the common meeting of the stakeholders, a total of 73 registrations were received for the YAC and senior 2021 EUROS in Bulgaria. Due to the cancellation of the senior qualification, so this event it is now an event open to all National Federations. The Beach Handball Commission will elaborate further qualification modus for upcoming competitions; motions will be presented at the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

As a general remark, it was commented that the spectators do not finance the events and organisers hold no rights and with all the costs it is impossible to break even; for such reasons

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it makes it more difficult to attract organisers. The new situation with I/D complicates matters. The events are too expensive to host.

It was questioned if the overall strategy (or a new strategy) is under discussion within the Beach Handball Commission, if the OG is in Brisbane in 2032, it could mean that beach handball will not be part of the Olympic Games for another 16 years and lead to beach handball not becoming commercial in the future. In response it was stated that it is a complicated topic as the EHF is not in the driver's seat and it is not known what other factors are at play i.e. Covid-19. The EHF is pleased that BH is part of the European Games (EOG), which can be a step forward as it is influencing the decision-making process on the level of the IOC; but it remains uncertain due to a lack of information.

It was remarked that there is no opportunity for beach handball prior to 2028 Olympic Games following a clear no from the IOC (Paris 2024). It was made clear to the IHF that the rules and regulations governing beach handball are to the required standard. For now, it was suggested by the NB that this branch of the sport stick to participation at the EU Games and aim for the YOG, and to aim to bring it as a OG showcase event, if the right solutions can be found in the future. A unified approach between the EHF and the IHF is essential to this matter.

In agreement with the opinion that the presence of beach handball would decline in the future, Member Meckes stated that SUI was another Federation concerning itself with its beach handball strategy, and presence at the OG would only add more pressure. In the current situation, it is difficult in terms of development i.e. bring more people to the sport.

Turning to the topic of the motion submitted by NOR concerning the uniforms in beach handball for women, Christensen encouraged discussion and imparted that this is a topic in Denmark as some players are not comfortable wearing the imposed uniform, with some national team players opting out for future events if it does not change.

### *3.7. Wheelchair Handball*

A combined IHF/EHF championship was scheduled for 11/2020 and was subsequently cancelled due to the pandemic. A new application process to host was issued, but the original organiser declined; another Federation has shown interest to host, but there is no confirmation on the event status as yet. It is hoped that the event can be realised in 11/2021 (max. 6 participants) as it is an important step to becoming part of the Paralympic family. Wheelchair handball activities take place across Europe and on other continents (AFR, ASI)) and though it is not viewed as a major project, it could be valuable.

It was commented that the area of wheelchair sport in Denmark is completely dominated by basketball. Member Neilson commented on a recent championship event in Pakistan, and considering the dominance of basketball, agreed that wheelchair handball needed to be developed further, but it could be a challenge.

### *3.8. Education Compensation*

Returning to the topic as discussed under agenda 5, Hausleitner reiterated that the suggestion on how to rank the Federation was just that and additional input was welcomed.

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It was commented that the main issue can be seen from two sides: 1. The money in handball is not comparable to that in football and 2. players not getting enough court time in the 1<sup>st</sup> division in Denmark, thus some player move to other countries and end up playing in lower divisions. But since the clubs have to pay a large education compensation fee, it is forcing them out of the game. The main challenge is not hinder people playing handball at the amateur level. Member Neilson voiced his agreement from the point of view of developing GBR players to a better level, when they arrive in other countries, they are not getting a salary, but 'good' conditions and the players (or the families) have to pay the transfer fees. This is a challenge for smaller countries, to improve their national teams, they have to send players out of the country to stronger nations.

#### **4. I/D Partnership**

See AP 2.1. of the Minutes to the Common Meeting of the Stakeholders; Hausleitner reiterated a few key points such as the good cooperation on the national team level, the increase in digital competence from DAZN. This is in addition to an expanded offer for potential partners, as well as continued developments towards the EHFTV platform, and trending upward figures in the area of social media. It was questioned if there are any changes in the global outlook as it currently seems that it is easier to organise a EURO than a club competition in this area. In response, it was noted that it is the actual playing of the matches that actually safeguards the contracts.

#### **5. 2021 EHF Activities**

##### **5.1. 15<sup>th</sup> Ordinary EHF Congress/Follow-up**

The main report was presented at the common meeting of the stakeholders; please see agenda point 2.2. of the minutes. It was repeated that the EHF is preparing for an in-person event and are working on the requisite safety measures.

##### **5.2. Timetable/Meeting CAL 2021**

The meeting calendar has been delivered with all the meetings prior to and immediately following the Congress in Luxembourg; there will be a new rundown for the new M/W Nations' Team Committees and the Nations' Board directly after the Congress with the new members. Sichelschmidt mentioned that work on the 2022/23 season calendar draft continues although there is only one major event currently blocked. It is acknowledged that this is behind schedule, and despite the changeable situation with cancellations and postponements of events, it is hoped that an opportunity to take a step forward arises.

##### **5.3. Other Topics**

**World Championship Play-Offs:** Hausleitner spoke of the attempt on an EHF internal level to assess the value of this project and evaluate the possibility to create an offer to centralise the sales process for the away TV rights to the World Championship Play-Offs (Qualification Europe). It was found that due to the costs (incl. agency fees, officials, etc.) vs. a potential estimated income, there was no significant benefit to the National Federations (approx. EUR 6k per participating Federation) through a sales process. It was deemed that it would not be beneficial to take the matter further, but instead to have the games on EHFTV possibly in the future; this could also mean delivering content to be shared via the Federation platforms. It was noted that the potential income is not high as it covers the away rights only. The idea (EHFTV) will be delivered to the EXEC for deliberation.



**Players agents:** the topic was intensively discussed on the basis of the presentation in the common meeting. The Federations representatives informed on their experience with the situation around agents and, in particular, concerns about the legal framework. Due to the fact that completely different situations are experienced in the various Federations, respective information, including the concerns, will be transported to the PHB.

## **6. Closing**

Chairman Christensen addressed the Members of the Nations' Board noting that it was the last meeting in the current constellation; he praised the ability of the NB to keep up good and solid friendships in a very competitive environment; the contribution from each member was excellent.

Following the Congress, the NB will change to the National Teams Committee (Men) and there will be new format of the election procedure; this is a new direction for European handball. Reflecting on the work of the Nations' Board, Chairman Christensen stated that it was a very good and competent sparring partner for the EHF and towards the other stakeholders (leagues, clubs, and players). Last, but not least, the NB has been the main platform for representing the interests of the National Federations and also serving as a mediator between the different interests of the stakeholders, and this was very important, as within the Federations there was also a responsibility towards the clubs, leagues, and players.

Continuing, he stated that the NB had always done it utmost to find the common and reasonable solution to the many complicated cases seen over the many years, not only a personal value, but the common core value of the Nations' Board. Christensen warmly thanked his colleagues and good friends for their contribution. He also extended his thanks to the EHF naming the individual persons, starting with President Wiederer for the excellent treatment of the Nations' Board.

Looking forward to new adventures, Chairman Christensen closed the 24<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Nations' Board, and the final meeting in this constellation.

Vienna, 15 March 2021

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