

## Minutes to the 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Professional Handball Board

<b>Date:</b>	Thursday, 15 December 2016	
<b>Time:</b>	15:00 – 17:30	
<b>Participants:</b>	Stefan Lövgren	Member EXEC
	Morten Stig Christensen	Member NB
	Philippe Bana	Member NB
	Xavier O’Callaghan	Member FCH
	Gerd Butzeck	Member FCH
	Peter Gentzel	Member EPHLA
	Marcus Rominger	Member EHPU
	Michael Sahl Hansen	Member EHPU
	Michael Wiederer	EHF President
	Markus Glaser	EHF Chief Sports Officer
<b>Excused:</b>	Predrag Bošković	Member EXEC
	Frank Bohmann	Member EPHLA
<b>Administration:</b>	Marsha Brown	EHF Office

### 1. Welcome and Introduction

In lieu of a chairman, President Wiederer used the opportunity to thank the members for coming to Gothenburg for the short meeting. In light of the upcoming meeting of the Executive Committee, Wiederer wanted the PHB to use the opportunity to select the PHB Chairman who then with immediate effect would take part in the EXEC meeting. It was reiterated that immediately following the Congress, the Executive Committee nominated their representatives to the Professional Handball Board; the Nations Board also held their first meeting of the electoral period and also selected their representatives to the PHB. The Women’s Handball Board held their meeting and selected Narcisa Lecusanu (ROU) as Chairwoman for the first half of the electoral period; Nodjialem Myaro will serve as WHB Chairwoman in the second half of the electoral period.

Noting that there was nothing new to add, Wiederer gave a brief overview of the history of the PHB; following the introduction of the concept, the stakeholders underwent a long process to reach the level that it is today. The EHF did its utmost to integrate the groups, though still in a stage of growth, it did start at full strength. EHF Honorary President, Jean Brihault was praised for his efforts in the process; the PHB began its work on a two

plus two years function period; it is now in a four-year period, which enabled a more stable working situation. It was noted that between December 2016 and March 2017, the PHB had a duty to define where it wanted to be in four years.

Wiederer also gave a situation update to the question of the EHF Secretary General; in order for the EHF to be stronger and to come further, there is to be a clear separation of tasks. He stressed that it was never the intention for the President to assume both roles and that it was impossible to do it in a satisfactory way. The introduction of the new EHF Secretary General would need time, followed by a smooth transition into the EHF office. The PHB were informed that input from the EHF office staff members and the Executive Committee was solicited; he also added that on the fringes of the Women's EHF EURO 2016 in SWE there had been many discussion and additional input had been submitted via email. A working document containing the profile for a Secretary General and the possible timing for implementation was prepared for the Executive Committee to be discussed in their meeting with the aim of defining the direction to take.

To the profile, it was underlined that the incoming Secretary General would have to work well with the EHF leadership and that the person would be approved and confirmed by the Executive Committee. The PHB agreed that the EHF should avoid the political appointment and strictly opt for competence and the professional approach. In response to the question of tender, President Wiederer stated that was a matter to be decided by the Executive Committee in their meeting. Wiederer pointed out that from the feedback it was discovered that there was no one in favour of bringing in a new Secretary General who was not linked to handball, and experience in other areas has shown that a true outsider is rarely ever successful. The PHB was in agreement with this statement.

## **2. PHB Meeting 10/2016 – Minutes/Follow-up Report**

At the last meeting the two new stakeholder representatives were invited to attend Wiederer noted that it was beneficial to the dialogue. To the minutes, no questions or additional comment was raised.

## **3. 13<sup>th</sup> EHF Ordinary Congress – Follow-up**

At the 13<sup>th</sup> EHF Ordinary Congress, the majority of the PHB members were in attendance in their various other functions. It was underlined that, in terms of atmosphere and outcome, it was a successful event; the concept worked and the feedback was positive. The elections showed that, concerning major functions, the Congress reacted in a unified way as opposed to 2004 that indicated conflict and struggle on the political level. After Bucharest 2015, the 2016 Congress was not expected to be so positive. As a result of the Congress, 21 separate protocols to the meetings were produced and distributed. Due to the EHF EURO preparations, this led to an intense working process; the minutes to the Congress were already published on 11 December.

## **4. Structural Issues and Nominations**

The structure of the EHF and its link to the Professional Handball Board is clear; nothing is new and nothing was changed. The PHB used the agenda point to elect the persons who would serve as Chairman and also as the representative in the EHF Executive Committee. Based on the efforts of Joan Marin, former FCH President and PHB Chairman, Gerd Butzack, nominated Xavier O'Callaghan to the position of Chairman; with no dissent,

the nomination was accepted. O'Callaghan paid tribute to Marin stating that it was a privilege to replace him as Chairman. To the position of Vice Chairman, Marcus Rominger declined to be nominated due to the upcoming elections within the EHPU in January, and instead offered the nomination to the European Professional Handball Leagues Association (EPHLA). Peter Gentzel nominated Frank Bohmann who was elected in absentia.

Concerning the stakeholder representative nomination to the EHF Court of Arbitration Council (ECA), and overview of the situation was given by President Wiederer. He explained that the body was introduced in full compliance with the existing arbitration system and from the very beginning was presented as the alternative to CAS (Court of Arbitration for Sport/SUI) and the competence for the handball sport; ECA also provides a more cost and time effective adjudication platform. Each case before ECA is resolved by a panel where each party can choose an arbitrator; all arbitrators have a legal education and are nominated by the EHF or by the National Federations. The two parties then agree on the third arbitrator. In order to adapt the current system, two motions were tabled at the Congress: motion 2A sought to amend the ECA Council with a stakeholder representative the ECA Council does not take part in the panels but functions as an overhead in special cases. Motion 2B proposed to open the nomination process towards the list of arbitrators; this was to allow other groups to nominate arbitrators that would be then confirmed by the ECA Council.

The motion that was presented in two parts went into immediate effect; it was suggested that a stakeholder representative be nominated by the Professional Handball Board who would find someone with a legal background and who had the trust of the PHB.

Concluding the agenda point, it was underlined that the system in place is unique to handball and not in other sports; the EHF is regularly asked to present the system to other team sports.

## **5. Reports EXEC/NB/MFCH/EPHLA/EHPU**

**EXEC:** the minutes to the meetings °132 and °133 were distributed; no additional comment was added.

**NB:** the first meeting with the new constellation of members took place shortly after the Congress and the Nations Board was pleased to welcome Mark Schober (GER) and Ingo Meckes (SUI) to the group. The NB discussed the objectives of the new period that would include encouraging and supporting more professionalism within the National Federations and strengthening ties between the stakeholders. Looking briefly to the accomplishments, the NB noted the major step when it was decided to take the men's EHF EURO from 16 to 24 teams; for EHF EURO 2020, 48 teams are part of the qualification. Another objective is to capitalise on educational opportunities; it was said that there are big differences between the Federation and the Nations Board would look to working in cooperation with EHF CAN to develop more tailored courses for the future that could target people who work in the offices of the National Federations.

**MFCH:** Prior to the EHF Congress, the FCH held a meeting in Mallorca that was described as interesting and held under a good atmosphere; IHF President Moustafa was in attendance and gave a speech at the end of the dinner, which resulted in an invitation extended to FCH by the IHF to attend talks in Basle with the aim of negotiating an agreement with IHF MD Amal Khalifa, and Head of Competitions, Patric Strub. Another short meeting was held during the EHF Congress, which was also positive. The PHB were also informed that the

MFCH planned to prolong Memorandum of Understanding with the EHF as it is the opinion of the MFCH that it is the right time to do so. However, there has been contact between an external agency, interested in making an offer, and clubs; with much money at stake, the clubs are interested to know what the future could look like. There may also be a third party showing interest; however, it was agreed that there should be a joint conclusion in order to gain the best possible result. Butzeck noted that the open communication with EHF MD David Szlezak and EHF President Wiederer and the common opinion to use the situation in a way to achieve the maximum benefit; the MFCH hoped to reach a conclusion to the issue in January 2017. Though the FCH was trying to optimise the financial result, it was stressed that money was not the only interest or issue being discussed when finalising a new agreement; the FCH is also focused on the area of development of the sport overall.

**EPHLA:** At the end of November, the EPHLA held a meeting in Paris; Marcus Rominger (EHPU) as well as other stakeholders, Markus Glaser (EHF), were in attendance. On behalf of the EPHLA, Peter Gentzel highlighted the presentation of the Polish league. The PHB are informed that the league in Poland is a collaboration between the Polish Handball Federation and its main sponsor PGNiG with all rights belonging to the league. The Polish league is in the process of applying to become a full member of EPHLA and the matter will be treated at the next meeting of the EPHLA in Cologne. It was also noted that in the new Polish league, there will be no relegation for two years; Gentzel also briefly explained the playing system (round robin); extra time decides the winner as opposed to a draw as well as the awarding of a different number of points for different group matches. In addition, at the meeting the French league gave a presentation covering an overview of service providers and the challenges of scheduling, a matter that has been discussed in previous meetings of the PHB. Gentzel informed on the French and German leagues having new TV contracts requested that national team matches are televised on Thursdays. To this matter it was discussed on how the stakeholders could find a solution that also fit the EHF playing schedule; it was suggested that the stakeholders group begin a communication and maybe agree on moving the playing dates that are fixed according to the ranking. If this element was removed it would solve a lot of the issues for the leagues, the club and the EHF. It was made clear that the suggestion was neither agreed nor discussed within the EHF, it was just an idea where the parties were open to further exploration in that direction. The proposal was approved by the PHB

**EHPU:** Marcus Rominger informed the PHB that the stakeholder group is not working fully on the professional level and it relies on voluntary engagement. The EHPU will meet in January where there are many important things to be decided. The group was informed that Simon Friis would be in Gothenburg on 16 December to discuss EHPU projects and the extension of the Infrastructure Support Programme. The EHPU continues to work towards its objectives in terms of growth and structure. Concerning the development of the Athletes Commission within the International Handball Federation, the invitation extended by the IHF to the EHPU was not realised. The EHPU was aware that the IHF Athletes Commission was founded in August 2016, but only made aware of the members via secondary information. The IHF AC members are: Gro Hammerseng-Edin (NOR/Chairwoman), Diego Simonet (ARG), Mouna Chebbah (TUN), Cristina Neagu (ROU), and Igor Vori (CRO). Rominger stated his disappointment with the engagement of the European federations; most nations failed to nominate candidates to the commission and Rominger gave specific examples of this. Rominger underlined the importance of the opening the communication channels between the IHF AC and the EHPU. The PHB was

informed that a meeting of the IHF AC has been convened and will take place in France during the Men's World Championship.

Rominger raised the topic of protective players' equipment. He stated that it was a topic that needed to return to the agenda (also in March) to be discussed in order to find solutions and also a way to approach the IHF. He underlined that clear rules are needed, but the focus now should be what is good for the players. In light of the new rules, Rominger wished to open a discussion on the changes to the rules that became valid with 1 July 2016. He mentioned that the EHPU had received clear feedback from the players as to what is good and what is not good; again for the PHB to find an approach with the IHF to maybe repeal or further amend some of the rules. Adding further information to the issue of protective equipment, Michael Sahl Hansen informed the PHB that players wishing to use specific equipment must first send it to the IHF Medical Commission where it will be evaluated and may or may not be approved. Hansen believed that such a practice could have repercussions, but the idea of eventually listing the items in a catalogue could be beneficial at some point.

In the discussion that followed, President Wiederer added to the dialogue by giving the PHB examples of what the EHF faced (multiple contacts from Federations, slight discord with the IHF, situation at the EHF EURO SWE, etc.) due to the change in the rules. The EHF did implement the rule changes in accordance with the IHF. Wiederer reiterated that point of the PHB from the October meeting, by stating that the target remains to harmonise the rules in respect to clothing and equipment as on a technical level it is impossible for the referees and delegates to resolve any issues. The situation needed to be discussed because of others factors to consider such as fashion, individual contracts, etc.; clarification is needed. Morten Stig Christensen stressed the point that the safety of the players is paramount. With the example of football being used, the EHPU did agree that there President Moustafa concerning player satisfaction with the new rules was contradicted by player statements sent to the EHPU that shows that 95% of respondents, were unhappy with the 7/6 rule. It was also said that the observers on the table have also experienced issues with the implementation of the rules i.e. checking the number of players on the court. Wiederer noted that the feedback needed to be specific as it became clear that there seemed to be three rules that were seemingly accepted and two where more dialogue was needed. Reference was made to AP6.1. of the IHF Council Minutes (n°9) containing the rule-by-rule feedback.

Regarding players, specifically the female representative for the players who is currently nominated by the Executive Committee, Wiederer informed the PHB of a question raised in the WHB meeting earlier that day. It was asked if there was an institution that would assume this task in the future. At this time there are four former top players who only ended their careers in recent years in the WHB. Wiederer stated that for the EHF, though there is an agreement between the EHF and the EHPU, the players' structure is unclear as the EHPU seemingly represents men's handball only. Thus, for the future it has to be known if there is to be a separate organisation for women or will it be a section under the umbrella of EHPU. In response to the question raised, Rominger underlined that for men's handball there is a something of a structure; for women's handball the EHPU works with some organisations that handle both male and female player issues, and in other countries there is no unit for female players. Taking reference to a conversation held with EHF Honorary President Jean Brihault, where it was stated that it would be good if the EHPU could be the umbrella for both the men and the women; and it should be the goal of the players' representative to the Women's Handball Board could be

pronounced by the EHPU. But at present the EHPU does have only a few female members (i.e. ISL, NOR, NED). Rominger also noted the difficult situation of some players being able to get assistance from a player's representative in some countries and not in others, and pointed out that EHPU does not get the required feedback. Hansen underlined that the EHPU is not ignoring female players as they have a strong representation within the union, but noted that it is by chance and not by structure. However, this particular issue is on the agenda for the next EHPU meeting as it is the intention to move in this direction.

## **6. Competitions**

### **6.1. Men's National Team Competitions**

Opening the agenda point the PHB were informed on the ongoing qualifications to the top events. Phase 1 of EHF EURO 2020 continues in January 2017, for this event a total of 48 National Federations are involved. For the EHF, this is a new situation. The next qualification rounds of EHF EURO 2018 (CRO) continue in May/June 2017. From the EHF point of view, the organisation is highly motivated to do more with the national team qualification; it was mentioned on several occasions that overall national team qualifications can draw more interest than a club activities. There is also more interest from the teams who are also eager to do more, but at the same time it is a struggle because it can be hard to build interest if a weaker team draws against a stronger team. The media has to keep refreshing the interest for the matches; and giving examples, Glaser stated that there are multiple issues regarding venues where the EHF has to intervene. Even though there have been improvements, the EHF EURO qualification remains a big challenge for the EHF. Wiederer underlined that for the EHF EURO 2020, due to the financial support from Infront, the qualifications would improve.

EHF Executive Committee representative, Stefan Lövgren, informed the PHB on elements of an EHF EURO 2020 coordination meeting that took place earlier in the day. In order to promote the event and raise interest among the partners and other stakeholders, the three organisers are working on various concepts. For instance there will be a tournament prior to the event that will take place during the qualification so it means no additional days and there are plans to involve all participating teams from the beginning. Glaser continued by stating that it had to be understood from the side of the competitions, and it is the hope that the EHF can find the right approach to the matches and the Federations, as it is up to the EHF to define to what extent the EHF EURO qualifications will be tackled in a different way. The EHF also wants the rotation of players to be discussed in the run up to the event depending on the opponents.

### **6.2. Club Competitions**

CSO Glaser stated that there was nothing new to inform the PHB about. The competition season is proceeding according to schedule and without major incident. The EHF Cup draws and workshop were executed in December; a good number of teams were present and some of them underwent venue inspections. Glaser noted that the topic of arenas remain an ongoing issue.

## **7. Working period 2016 – 2020**

Opening the agenda point, EHF stated that it was the common responsibility of the members to define the fields where the PHB wants to be active. It was underlined that that for decisions to be taken by Congresses in 2018 and 2020 respectively, the working process should begin in 2017. Wiederer also mentioned the recurring matter of the players' workload, as it returns to the agenda the PHB has to be careful to tackle it in a good way



to ensure balance. Other input from MFCH included that income needs to be generated on one hand, and expenses need to be reduced on the other i.e. injury prevention via evaluation and different interpretation of the rules. Sales could also be dramatically improved by implementing a new strategy; it is agreed that a top sales person is needed, but the largest task is to develop the strategy; and therefore strategy is regarded as a 2017 target. Concerning referees, it was mentioned that the discussion surrounding the referees needs to be limited. It was suggested by FCH to bring the matter of performance and the professionalization of referee nomination as it was implied that it should not be a political task rather it should be undertaken by a professional (office – full time) like in other sports and that the current system should be changed. Moreover, the introduction and implementation of technologies should be added to the agenda. The Nations Board suggested that the global YAC system be revisited and the PHB should determine how to analyse the situation and how to approach the IHF; strengthening the product handball was requisite.

Returning to the matter of strategy, the idea of meeting the various groups was voiced; based on a previous round table experience in France, it was deemed important for the stakeholders (leagues, clubs, federations, professionals, coaches, referees, players, and representatives) to communicate with the EHF and also to hear each other. This idea could be implemented across the handball spectrum on a professional level.

#### **8. 2017 CAL – Events & Meetings**

With the calendar at hand, the PHB are aware of the upcoming events and the scheduling of the meetings. No additional information was given.

#### **9. Miscellaneous**

No topics raised.

Chairman O’Callaghan closed the meeting by thanking the PHB members for their presence and contribution, and stated that he looked forward to the future cooperation.

Vienna, 18 December 2016