

## Minutes to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Professional Handball Board

<b>Date / Time:</b>	Tuesday, 12 March 2018 / 8:30 – 12:30	
<b>Venue:</b>	Hilton Garden Inn Hotel, Vienna/AUT - Gloriette 1	
<b>Participants:</b>	Predrag Bošković	Member EXEC (partly)
	Stefan Lövgren	Member EXEC
	Morten Stig Christensen	Member NB
	Philippe Bana	Member NB
	Gregor Planteu	Member FCH
	Gerd Butzeck	Member FCH
	Nikolas Larsson	Member EHLB
	Frank Bohmann	Member EHLB
	Michael Sahl Hansen	Member EHPU
	Michael Wiederer	EHF President
	Martin Hausleitner	EHF Secretary General
	Markus Glaser	EHF Chief Sports Officer
	Marsha Brown	EHF Corporate Liaison
<b>Excused:</b>	Marcus Rominger	Member EHPU

*Please note that only the key inferences from the ensuing discussions throughout the meeting are condensed for the minutes.*

### 1. Welcome and Introduction

Chairman Butzeck welcomed the members of the PHB to the meeting and noted the interesting items on the agenda.

### 2. PHB Meeting 10/2018 – Minutes and Follow-up

With no additional comment, the minutes were adopted.

### 3. EHF/IHF Information

#### 3.1. EHF Executive Committee / EHF Marketing GmbH

With the minutes at hand, a brief overview of the recent activity at this level was given. Information was delivered on the most recent meetings of the EHF Executive Committee that took place in Paris (12/2018) and Hamburg (01/2019). The finalisation of the season 2020/21 international calendar, and its subsequent distribution, the exploration into the professionalization of officiating, as well as the format for international club competitions are among the matters treated in the EXEC meetings; these topics and others such as YAC/EURO events would return later in the PHB agenda. The same holds true for EHF Marketing relevant issues.

### **3.2. International Handball Federation**

EHF President Wiederer summarised the information and the noted the fundamental decisions from the most recent IHF Council. The expansion of the IHF World Championships to 32-team events (senior, youth, junior) beginning with the men's 2021 event in Egypt was presented. The 32 places have been determined as follows:

- ◆ 1 place – organiser  
(Compulsory places reduced accordingly if more than one organiser)
- ◆ 1 place – reigning world champion (direct qualification)
- ◆ 12 performance places (based on teams ranked 1 – 12 at the preceding event)
- ◆ 17 compulsory places (4 AHF / 4 CAHB / 4 EHF / 1 NACHC / 3 SCAHC / 1 OZE)  
(If OZE fails to attain 5th place at Asian Championship, the place reverts to additional IHF allocated wild card)
- ◆ 1 wild card

Thirteen (13) places will be available to Europe at the 2021 event: four (4) compulsory places + one (1) reigning world champion + eight (8) performance places based on ranking at the 2019 WCh DEN/GER. As a result of the new system, it was noted that the next event will result in one match less for top players; with more places for European teams, the 'fight' is reduced; match schedule reduces the number of 'weak' matches (preliminary groups of 4 instead of 6). A comprehensive overview was presented at an earlier meeting; for a more detailed overview of the qualification pathway, please refer to the minutes of common meeting of the European Handball League Board and Nations Board.

The International Handball Federation held an inter-commission meeting that resulted in the mandate to convene the 'IHF New Rules Working Group 2018 – 2022' to target the current dialogue surrounding competitions and rules. It was stated that the initiative for new ideas emanating from Europe was lacking, meaning that a very small group on the IHF level defined the new rules; this left the EHF struggling with the challenges of implementation. In order to have influence, Europe must be present and be part of the dialogue. The working group will meet again in Basel from 28-30 March 2019 and the EHF will be represented by CC Member Refereeing, Dragan Nachevski and Helmut Höritsch from the EHF office. The meeting will be led by IHF President, Dr Hassan Mustafa and IHF PRC Chairman, Ramon Gallego.

### **3.3. Other contacts**

The EHF leadership were party to many high level engagements in the sport-political realm since the last PHB meeting; President Wiederer briefly mentioned the visit to Nyon and underscored the successful meeting with President Čeferin and reaffirmed the positive relationship with UEFA. The open dialogue resulted in an agreement to cooperate regarding the activities in 2024. It was noted that though the budgets of the two organisations are vastly different, they still experience similar issues.

President Wiederer also spoke of the visit to FIBA International and the positive meeting with Andreas Zagklis, the new Secretary General. With approximately 250 persons administering the sport of basketball globally, Wiederer recommended, if the opportunity presented itself, to visit the House of Basketball, including an exhibition, in Geneva. It was noted that FIBA Europa will remain based in Munich.

#### 4. Stakeholder Reports: NB/MFCH/EHLB/EHPU *(additional remarks to minutes)*

- **NB:** Christensen reported on the volume of information received during the joint meeting with the European Handball League Board, as well as during the meeting of the Nations Board. He briefly mentioned the interesting discussions around the various topics that included how to secure a platform (interest group for Federations) comparable to the club, league, and players representation platforms. Christensen stated that a forum and the involvement of the Federations are necessary to bring together and raise the various levels. He also mentioned the notion of ‘handball for life’, which was in part about creating young leaders across the landscape of the sport. The Nations Board also discussed, amongst other items, intelligent technologies (iFloor) and the video proof system.
- **MFCH:** Butzeck briefly reiterated the changes in MFCH leadership; David Baruffet (FC Barcelona) has replaced Xavier O’Callaghan on the FCH Board. At the most recent meeting information on revenues to the clubs as of 2020 was provided. It was noted that it was a difficult task to develop a reasonable finance distribution regarding the various elements (split m/w & CL/EHL/EHFC internal); the requirements in the second tier are nearly the same, and the stakeholder had to ensure that it also receives a reasonable amount of money.

The PHB was also informed on the continued cooperation between the MFCH and the IHF; through deliberations on how to deliver the signing fee to the MFCH members, the stakeholder group decided to support handball in the USA/CHN regions. Based on the lack of presence on these markets, MFCH chose to assist in the education of players with the aim of producing competitive teams in USA/CHN by giving financial support to clubs who engage players from these geographic areas. It is understood that good TV figures can be achieved by seriously entering these markets, and many people are working together to realise the strengthening of handball in the USA and CHN. It was emphasised that the development process in CHN will begin with women’s handball. Butzeck underlined that for the benefit of the sport in the future it was necessary to strengthen all continents.

- **EHLB:** Larsson spoke of the recent activities within EHLB and noted the challenges faced as the group endeavoured to broaden contact between the league representatives of Europe stating that some structures remained unclear. However, steps have been taken i.e. communication with RUS contacts proved very positive. The EHLB wishes to make use of the EHF in this area as many leagues are driven via the Federation. Larsson places emphasis on cooperation and connectivity within the handball community. Issues raised at the EHLB meeting included challenges faced by leagues due to the new playing format; the fact that an agreement was sourced and the decision taken remained positive though practical implementation in some cases could prove difficult, but in other leagues, optimisation of contracts are already in place. The EHLB also discussed the international calendar (see AP7.1.).

In response to the EHLB report, it was mentioned that, in the past years based on common interests, the development (i.e. lines, flooring, and advertising set-up) of the sport is ongoing.

Any action has to be done in a constructive way moving towards the main objective of finding an overall picture to sell the sport to the clients; it was underlined that friction-free solutions for everyone are not possible.

- **EHPU:** Hansen reported that the group is very active on cementing their structures, which included gaining new members i.e. ROU; the EHPU is currently working together with ROU on a matter that seemingly goes against employment laws; contact with AUT is ongoing. At the last meeting, the topic of the players' workload returned to the EHPU agenda. It was stated that top players are becoming more involved in the EHPU. The EHPU will meet again on the fringes of the Final4 in Cologne; the group will extend invitations to the IHF President and players not involved in the event.

In response to the EHPU report, the volume of interviews from players with a negative tone was remarked. Such interviews fail to mention the steps taken that are clearly to the benefit of the players. It was suggested that EHPU take steps to ensure that its members are fully informed (campaign the truth) on the relevant matters.

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

### **5.1. EHF EURO 2020 SWE/AUT/NOR – Status Update**

EHF Secretary General, Martin Hausleitner provided a brief update on upcoming event highlighting the ticket sales especially in Sweden where the majority of the 50.000 have been sold. The preparations are ongoing and in the area of transportation charter flights have been organised, thus taking the needs of the players into consideration by separating rest and travel days.

Additionally, the pre-event timeline was adjusted in order to know the environment of the EURO much earlier – the Heads of Delegation Conference in June will be framed by additional activities such as the media and sponsor workshops as well as the draw events (MCL 27.06./EURO 28.06.); as this will follow two weeks after the conclusion of the Qualifiers, it will allow for the teams to make the necessary arrangements. Furthermore, the new format for the final weekend (expected to see 24.000 spectators) includes new approaches to the entertainment/spectator concepts, as well as the prize giving ceremonies.

### **5.2. EHF EURO 2022/2024 – Status Update**

Hausleitner stated that these events will be the first that will experience the full influence of the new partnership (Infront/DAZN) as well as additional opportunities for promotion. The first organiser workshop with Germany (EURO 2024) took place on 11 March – for this event, the venues are known. The workshop with Hungary and Slovakia (EURO 2022) is scheduled for 20 March 2019 – a new arena with a capacity for 20.000 spectators will be built in the Hungarian capital, Budapest.

In the area of development, the EHF is working together with Kinexon investigating the potential of 'player tracking'. The EHF underlined that it was very aware of the sensitive nature of such a project, and that it had to be cautious as to what information would be offered to stakeholders (media, coaches, players, TV spectators). The organisation is working towards a timeline that would allow for

a solution to be presented in June; this would be followed by information being provided to the Federations as the main partner in such an endeavour.

Promotion concepts to be delivered by DAZN will focus on qualification matches; the objective is to increase social media figures over the next four years. Emphasis will be placed on the connected environment (OTT/DAZN/FB/Public TV). Influencers, according to the concept, will be engaged – content will be targeted and age demographic specific.

### **5.3. World Championships 2019/2021**

Based on the information already provided (see AP 3.2.) a brief recap was given. It was noted that Europe was not going to receive as many places as originally thought, and that the number of places would roughly remain the same. However, due to the increase to 32 teams in a WCh, the places would not reduce. The enlargement of the World Championships has an impact on places available as well as the qualifications; the EHF will continue to work to find a suitable solution.

Bringing the matter of the qualification pathway to the fore, the PHB noted that the first matches to the 2021 IHF World Championship (Qualification 1) will begin in October 2019 and conclude in January 2020 prior to the EURO. Due to the changes (international and European), as well as the Olympic cycle, an intermediate round (Qualification 1B Play-Off) has to be implemented; the matches will be played between the teams of WCh 2021 Q1 and the remaining teams of EHF EURO 2020 parallel to the Olympic Games (JPN) qualification tournament and will exclude those teams scheduled to play in the OG QT in April 2020. The WCh 2021 Qualification 2 PO Europe will be played in June 2020.

### **5.4. YAC Competitions in the Future**

Introducing the topic, CSO Glaser gave a short recap of the system that rolled out with the 2016 events (1<sup>st</sup> tier: EURO/2<sup>nd</sup> tier: Championships). Removing the qualification element, it was agreed that the system would be reviewed following the generation cycle. Following the evaluation by the working group in February 2019, it was noted that organisers are concentrated (LTU, SLO, etc.), some teams are one year without competition, chances to progress for second category teams to WChs are reduced, YAC events are less attractive to organisers and teams alike. The lack of opportunity to gain experience for some lower ranked teams means that the development of the players is stunted.

It was underlined that the gap between the teams need to close and the progression of teams (players) must be visible via the categories (moving up). The YAC events are still supported by the European Open, and despite the change of the age category, the number of registrations indicate that it was ultimately a good approach. The IHF Youth and Junior events situation and its impact on YAC competitions incl. places for European teams at a 32-team event were summarised for the PHB.

In the effort to correct the issues identified, the recommendations of the working group will be tabled at the next meeting of the Executive Committee in April; this will be followed by a comprehensive presentation to the Federations at the Conference of Presidents in June.

## 6. Club Competitions

### 6.1. Season 2018/2019 – Status

The current club season is progressing well and has experienced no major problems. After many meetings and contacts surrounding a very complex and political case, an interim resolution was found to quell the Nordstream/Club marketing issue in the men's Champions League; it was noted that the situation is acceptable especially what concerns the situation of the involved clubs and the partner.

### 6.2. Season 2019/2020 – Preview

The draw for the Group Phase of the competitions will be held at the end of June in Vienna. Continuing, it was repeated that there will be no major changes to the upcoming season; in relation to changes within the competition structure, the first changes will be implemented in summer 2020. At this time, concerning season 2019/2020, the situation is okay. Nevertheless, there are to be two technical motions presented to the Executive Committee: concerning the Women's EHF Cup, the regulations relating to placements have to be amended i.e. to eliminate the possibility of having five clubs from one country; regarding all competitions a motion will be presented on the use of different advertising on different players (IHF ruling states that shirts (tricots) have to be identical). The motions are currently under discussion.

### 6.3. Club Competitions as of 2020/2021

CSO Glaser concisely presented the playing systems of the men's club competitions as of season 2020/2021.

- **Champions League:** system approved in December 2018 and information distributed to the stakeholders. Currently technical details (seeding, placement, etc.) are under discussion.
- **European Handball League:** will replace the EHF Cup - various alternatives (seeding and placement, etc.) under evaluation, the complexity of the seeding was underlined. This system has only two qualification rounds.
- **EHF Cup:** formerly the Challenge Cup. Playing system remains unchanged, but matches will be played on the weekend.

In the ensuing discussion, Chairman Butzeck stressed that withdrawal from the Champions League during the season is to be avoided at all cost. Thus, the regulations have to be amended accordingly. The suggestion was not only about protecting the competition, but also in reference to the accountability towards the new partnership agreement. It was noted that a deposit system is foreseen for all competitions and safeguarding measures will be put before the Executive Committee; furthermore, the matter is on the agenda of the upcoming meeting of the Men's Club Board (EHFM).

President Wiederer praised the achievements in the development of the club competitions; the changes have not been too radical, but were enough to signal the market that handball was doing something new. The competitions have managed to hold the interest of the stakeholders. Despite the difficulties faced, the many discussions held, the organisation always managed to find the balance that the stakeholders could live with.

## **7. Other Issues**

### **7.1. International Calendar 2020/2021**

*The discussion that followed based on the information provided was summarised to the pertinent points.*

The 2020/2021 international calendar was approved by the Executive Committee in Paris (12/2018) and distributed (approx. 20 months in advance) to the handball stakeholders. The main objectives for creating the new calendar were:

- More rest time for the players
- Fixed highlight (F4) and fixed end to club season
- Better (March/May) National Team Week (NTW) scheduling

In response to the information provided to the LNH/FRA situation (that will be reviewed to avoid any misunderstanding) and the questions raised during the discussion, the league representatives confirmed that there was a common understanding among the European leagues that the league season would end prior to the Champions League Final4. The EHLB stated that with the group it is commonly agreed that the NTW in March is too early; it was recommended that this be placed one week later (and switched with the WNTW). The PHB agreed that it should be evaluated – CSO Glaser was tasked to undertake the evaluation and prepare a report.

A further proposal suggested adding a recommendation of a date for the national cup competition to the international calendar for transparency (free weekends) and organisational purposes (booking of halls). Moreover, it was asked if the idea of changing the timeframes of club and national team competitions e.g. national team activities on the calendar year (January to December) and club team activities on the seasonal calendar July to June could be examined. In response, it was stated that such a proposal would prove very difficult for various reasons; however, a pro/contra list would be undertaken on an office level in order to determine if the matter should be further evaluated. Out of the discussion, a clarification on the national ranking for leagues (places) was requested.

### **7.2. Refereeing/Professionalization of Refereeing**

To open the discussion, the sensitive nature of the matter at hand, and the fact that the process was incomplete, was underscored.

Following the dialogue that the nominations of referees should be made on an office level and not political level, and at the request of the stakeholder groups, the EHF agreed to undertake a comprehensive review of the officiating processes. Reinforcing the decision to re-evaluate the situation, the continued efforts to uphold the integrity of the sport, and the agreement entered into with Sportradar regarding betting (match-fixing) in 2017, as well as the intelligence report received that indicated suspect betting (based on match results and unusually high bets), which started a separate process that involved a betting oversight committee, police authorities, and the EHF Initiator of Proceedings.



In order to protect the sport, and in order to follow the mission of the organisation, the EHF Executive Committee confirmed that by 1 July 2019, a new system would among several organisational measures also be implemented which would see different nomination principles come into force.

The new structure was formulated on an office level and describing the elements, it was pointed out that it was not centrally about nominations, but about cooperation between the technicians (referees/officials' table), use of different technologies (headsets, video replay), etc. The new system has various components that were explained to the PHB: Competitions Commission (CC)/Member Refereeing; Business Group Competitions/Business Unit Referee Operations; EHF Assessors (Observers/Mentors); Technical Refereeing Committee (TRC); EHF Competence Academy & Network (CAN); and EHF Lecturers (Instructors).

The intricate nature of the topic was reiterated. The PHB unanimously supported the process presented in the knowledge that it was incomplete and would require further work in certain areas.

## **8. Various**

EHF President Wiederer spoke of the upcoming VELUX EHF Final4 coupled with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Final4 event. The PHB members were presented with their personal invitations to the Final4 as well as the fringe celebrations and activities. He noted that the special weekend kicks off on Friday afternoon (31 May) with the 'European Handball Talks' forum that will focus on the topic of players' workload – a sensitive and complex topic. The panel will feature external expertise and will have the involvement of players. On Friday evening, the official opening of the event at the LANXESS arena will take place where the teams will be presented and, to honour the anniversary, a monument to honour the winners of the Champions League will be unveiled. The weekend will continue with the VIP party, official press conference, etc. in addition to the matches.

Chairman Butzeck thanked the members of the Professional Handball Board for their contributions and closed the meeting.

For the Minutes: M. Brown  
Vienna, 15 March 2019

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