



**ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑΣ, ΑΘΛΗΤΙΣΜΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΝΕΟΛΑΙΑΣ**

**EU Sport Forum 2026
15 - 16 April 2026
Paphos, Cyprus, Coral Beach Hotel**

Introductory Remarks delivered by the Permanent Secretary, Mr Marios Panayides, on behalf of the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth, Dr Athena Michaelidou, 15 April 2026, 10:00 - 10:15, a.m.

It is a great honour and a true pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth, Dr Athena Michaelidou, to the EU Sport Forum 2026 here in Cyprus, an event organized in the framework of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026.

We are especially delighted to host you in Paphos - a city where history, culture and identity meet. Beyond its rich heritage, Paphos is also a city with a proud connection to sport. It is the birthplace of Stelios Kyriakides, one of the most inspiring figures in the history of European athletics. His victory in the Boston Marathon was more than a sporting achievement - it was a powerful message of resilience and dignity - and above all, solidarity in times of hardship. His legacy continues to remind us that sport is far more than competition - it is a source of hope and unity.

The EU Sport Forum has, over the years, established itself as one of the most important platforms for dialogue and cooperation in the field of sport at European level. It provides a unique space where policymakers, institutions and stakeholders can come together to exchange views, share expertise and collectively shape the future of sport in Europe.

In a rapidly evolving environment - marked by social, economic and technological change - the role of sport is becoming increasingly significant. The discussions of this year's Forum address issues of profound importance for the future of European sport. They touch upon the well-being of those who practice sport, the integrity and sustainability of its structures, its role within our broader regional context and the need to preserve fairness, solidarity and balance.

These are not abstract concerns, they are central to maintaining trust in sport and ensuring that it continues to serve our societies in a meaningful and inclusive way.

The key themes of this Forum are closely aligned with the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency in the field of sport, reflecting our shared commitment to strengthening the role of sport in society as a key pillar of public policy, contributing to health, social cohesion, economic development, and sustainable growth.

In particular, a central priority of the Cyprus Presidency is the promotion of sport tourism as a contributor to sustainable development. Through targeted policies and initiatives, we aim to strengthen local economies, support regional development and promote more sustainable tourism models. In this context, the Cyprus Presidency has prepared a set of Council conclusions on sport tourism as a contributor to sustainable development that is to be approved by the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council on 12 May.

The Cyprus Presidency also places strong emphasis on mental health in sport. We recognise the pressures faced by athletes and coaches, particularly at high-performance level and the need to support their well-being throughout all stages of their careers. In this context, the Cyprus Presidency intends to organise a dedicated exchange of views on the mental health of athletes in sport during the sport session of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council on 12 May. Sport Ministers will be asked to share national experiences and collectively identify the way forward for strengthening mental health support across European sport.

In addition, the Cyprus Presidency places strong emphasis on physical activity and active ageing as cornerstones of public health. Addressing physical inactivity is one of the major challenges facing Europe today and sport has a vital role to play in improving the quality of life and well-being of our citizens across all ages.

Furthermore, the Cyprus Presidency highlights the importance of strengthening the Mediterranean dimension of sport. As a country at the crossroads of Europe and the Mediterranean, we strongly believe in the role of sport as a bridge for dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding among nations.

These priorities reflect our broader vision: a vision of sport that is inclusive, sustainable and closely connected to the well-being of our societies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we begin the work of this Forum, we are reminded that sport has always been a unifying force in Europe. It brings people together, transcends differences and promotes shared values.

The EU Sport Forum offers us a valuable opportunity - not only to reflect on current challenges, but also to shape forward-looking policies that will strengthen the European sport model for future generations.

Let us therefore engage openly, listen attentively and work collaboratively, building on our common commitment to a strong, fair and inclusive European sport ecosystem. In this spirit, the Cyprus Presidency stands ready to support and advance our common efforts at European level.

In the spirit of Stelios Kyriakides, let us also remember that sport carries a message of perseverance, solidarity and hope - values that are more relevant today than ever before.

I wish you all a productive and inspiring EU Sport Forum 2026 and I hope you will enjoy your stay in Paphos, experiencing both its rich cultural heritage and the warm hospitality of Cyprus.