



Leading European Athletics Forward in Challenging Times

By European Athletics Interim President,

Dobromir Karamarinov

Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

I must start my address to the European Athletics family by paying tribute once more to our visionary leader, Svein Arne Hansen. In fact, Svein was much more than that; he was a deeply caring man and someone who never lost sight of his core values: integrity, transparency and teamwork. We have lost a dear friend and I miss him deeply, as I am sure you all do too.

However, Svein would not have wanted his passing to hold European Athletics back in any way. So with the leadership baton passed on to me, I still passionately share the long-term vision of "Athletics on every phone and in every home in Europe". But to reach that ambitious outcome, we will now need to plot a very different path as we continue to face the gravest crisis in our 50-year history.

Bit by bit, COVID-19 has eaten away at our competition calendar for 2020. Back in April, we announced the painful news that the European Athletics Championships in Paris had been cancelled.

More recently, due to the alarming resurgence of the virus in Europe, we were left with no choice but to cancel the SPAR European Cross-Country Championships in Dublin, which was our only remaining event for 2020.

Of course, we are not alone. Athletes and sports fans all around the world have been starved of elite sport. But as European Athletics Interim President, it is now my duty, and my single-minded ambition, to lead our great sport forward and see European athletes back competing at the highest level as soon as possible.

As a 400m hurdles athlete and as a national, Balkan and European Athletics leader over several decades, I have never backed out of a challenge. I also know the importance of detailed planning in order to overcome the obstacles that lie in our path.

So this paper sets out my strategic plan for protecting the long-term future of European Athletics with short and medium term solutions that have been developed in collaboration with our Executive Board, and Council Members, complemented by valued input from our Member Federations and their athletes.

The short and medium term measures that I propose for the next 18 months are:

- **Protect 2021 European Athletics Events**
- **Support Member Federations**
- **Build on the Core Strength of European Athletics**
- **Lead Recovery through Innovation**



Protect 2021 European Athletics Events

My main goal is to ensure the delivery of European elite level events and championships in 2021. This will help boost our financial recovery from COVID-19.

European Athletics was one of the first sports organisations to set up a COVID-19 taskforce, which continued to provide daily risk assessments for all of our events. It was necessary to take an ultra-cautious approach by cancelling our 2020 events to safeguard the health and welfare of our stakeholders.

However, we have been using the interruption to competition to ensure all our key events can be held safely in a meaningful way in 2021.

I aim to achieve this by:

- a. Working closely with our COVID-19 Taskforce and the 2021 Local Organising Committees in adopting best-in-class safety protocols for our athletes, officials and other stakeholders, to ensure the safest possible environment at all times at every European Athletics competition.
- b. I am determined that we should be led by the science, while learning from other professional individual and team sports, which are already pioneering the return to competition.

We are tracking major sports events that are currently taking place and we are reaching out to the leaders of the most relevant ones to share best practice. For example, at the moment we are paying particular attention to how we can create bio-secure bubbles over a period of four to five days. We are also monitoring other sports that are allowing limited numbers of spectators into indoor and outdoor competition venues.

- c. We are also reviewing unique measures specifically suitable for the disciplines and events in our sport by working with World Athletics and our own medical and scientific associates.
- d. We are developing a strong back-up hosting plan for each event in case of late changes in national or international travel rules, to ensure that our athletes can prepare for events with greater certainty. However, this will require all of us to be more flexible in our planning and preparation for events.
- e. In the middle of Q4 2020, we aim to publish the: *European Athletics 2021 Event Safety Guidelines and Protocols (COVID-19)*. This important and fully transparent resource will be a digital tool that will be updated in real time. This will help all stakeholders to follow the guidelines and provide a consistent safe approach for all.

Support Member Federations

The strength of our core product (more of this in the next section), aligned to careful financial management, means that we have been able to guarantee funding for all Member Federations until 2022.

From the various regular e-meetings and calls I have had with Member Federations, I know many will experience a fall in revenue and government financial support over the coming months. However, I want to make it clear that we will continue to wrap our arms around the athletics family and support you in any way we can.

European Athletics is actively seeking solutions to stay close to our Member Federations during the pandemic. For example, our European Athletics Convention is a vital platform and we will therefore be hosting it virtually this year.

Similarly, since January 2020, we have increased funding for our Member Federation Support Programmes. In addition to the e-Convention, we have continued to provide high performance webinars, with eight already delivered in 2020 and approximately 20 more scheduled for 2021. Other important support programmes, that we will continue to prioritise, include the Women Leadership e-programme and the Young Leaders e-Forum.

Under my leadership, education will continue to play a central role in our efforts to strengthen our Member Federations.



Build on the Core Strength of European Athletics

As we begin to plan for a post COVID-19 environment, it is important to remember how strong our core product is. Despite the challenges we have faced this year, European Athletics remains one of the strongest continental federations in world sport.

Since 2015, our finances have been strengthened through a new commercial strategy, which has seen renewed contracts with long-standing partners such as SPAR and EBU, whilst at the same time welcoming new global brands such as ATOS. In part, this is a result of the expansion of our event portfolio including the multisport European Championships.

Berlin 2018 in particular was a standout moment for the history of European Athletics and Svein's presidency. We hosted more than 360,000 spectators throughout the competition and had 5,434 hours of broadcast time, tripling the figure we achieved during the 2016 European Athletics Championships.

Our digital content during the event generated 45 million social media impressions, whilst viewership in Germany and the UK hit peaks of 6.3 million and 6.4 million respectively. We had similar viewership numbers across many other key European markets.

These are astonishing figures that show European Athletics has evolved into one of the most popular brands in European sport. Our core product is indeed strong and explains why there is a real hunger amongst the millions of fans around the world for our athletes to return to the track.



Lead Recovery through Innovation

My aim in the medium term is to have a stronger athletics landscape in Europe (post-COVID-19) in every area of the sport and I firmly believe that innovation is more important than ever. This does not necessarily mean creating new or hybrid events or disciplines; it is more about finding innovative ways that European Athletics can help lead our Member Federations towards recovery.

I am also keen to explore how innovation can help the European Athletics brand recommence its upward progress, and increase popularity of the sport across every age category.

As you know, we are not afraid to pioneer fresh approaches to attract new audiences to our sport. Dynamic New Athletics (DNA) is a great way to achieve this. Whilst initial reactions have been mixed, our debut at the European Games in Minsk was a historic occasion for DNA and we are already seeing many young athletes and fans embracing this new format.

We have also entered into a partnership with World Athletics for results management and technology aimed at enhancing the live, broadcast and digital viewing experience for spectators and fans.

We are already ahead of many of our peers on digital and social media, but we can always do more. Therefore, we are now in the process of updating our entire digital ecosystem. This will allow us to more efficiently commercialise the loyal following we enjoy in Europe and add even more value for existing and potential sponsors.

More commercial partners means greater revenues, which can then be re-invested in the programmes that help European Athletics lead the development of our sport. This includes expanding our pioneering anti-doping campaigns such as: 'I Run Clean™', as well as enhancing and increasing the number of educational programmes that we are providing for our Member Federations and their athletes.

The one lesson, above all others, which I will take forward from working with Svein over all those years, is emphasising the critical importance of protecting the integrity and good governance of our sport. Therefore, a key area I have begun to focus on is the prevention of harassment and abuse in athletics. Too many other sports have faced scandals recently involving young athletes who have suffered unnecessary and preventable abuse. If we want parents to continue to view athletics as an attractive activity for their children, then we must do everything in our power to create a safe environment for them to practise sport in.

To this end, I am reviewing carefully the excellent IOC Toolkit for Prevention and Abuse in Sport to help us develop our own guidelines for our sport.

It is also important under my interim leadership that European Athletics shows empathy to those in society that are suffering or repressed in these difficult times. The universality of athletics means it does not discriminate and we are here for all in Europe, from the victims of war to those suffering poverty or racial injustice.

So dear colleagues and friends, you can see that in order to achieve our vision of athletics being on every phone and in every home in Europe, we have a huge amount of work to undertake in both the short and medium term. This is mainly because of the unique challenge we face from the COVID-19 pandemic, but as always there are other issues to overcome and opportunities to seize.

As already stated above, the core European Athletics product is remarkably strong. My job as your interim President is to work closely with you all and build upon this solid platform and lead our sport forward to recovery. We need to be cautious yet optimistic; safe but pioneering; compassionate yet competitive.

As much as I am here to lead, I am also here to listen. Like my predecessor, I place tremendous value on teamwork and integrity. As dear Svein always used to say: "Together we are stronger".

I look forward to working with each and every one of you. I am open to your suggestions and feedback and I look forward to updating you all in the next few months on progress with the work I have outlined above.

Yours faithfully,

Dobromir Karamarinov
*Interim President,
European Athletics*

