

**SROC**  
SPORTS RIGHTS OWNERS COALITION



SROC Manifesto

# EU 2024-2029 mandate

# SROC'S POLICY PRIORITIES FOR 2024-29

During the upcoming mandate of the European institutions the Sports Rights Owners Coalition calls on European policymakers to:

- 1** Continue to support the freedom of sports events organisers to license our content on a territorial basis and maintain the current system of justified geo-enabling
- 2** Adopt legislation to tackle illegal live content piracy, taking into account the impact of the 2023 European Commission Recommendation
- 3** Continue to promote and protect sustainable and viable models of sports competitions in Europe, intending that sporting merit will be a relevant criteria for success and supporting athletes at every level from elite to grassroots
- 4** Resist calls for the introduction of telecommunications network fees, which will only have a detrimental impact on the European creative sector as a whole, including our members, and on consumers
- 5** Set out in legislation compulsory criteria for sports betting licensees in Europe to only use official data sources to protect sports integrity and intellectual property.



# SPORT IS A EUROPEAN SUCCESS STORY

Sport is an integral part of European cultural identity. Europe has played a fundamental role in the development of modern sports competitions worldwide for well over 150 years. Many of the world's most popular sports originated in Europe, where the rules were codified and the games taken out to new participants over the world. Today, many worldclass and iconic sports competitions continue to be developed and hosted in Europe and they draw in millions of spectators and broadcast audiences.

Beyond the cultural and emotional connections that Europeans have with sport, it also drives community cohesion, enhances social inclusion and benefits the health of millions of people across the continent.

**Moreover, sport is a key economic driver in Europe: it accounts for more than 2% of Europe's total GDP and almost 3% of employment in the EU.<sup>1</sup>**

We at the Sports Rights Owners Coalition ("SROC") are a forum of over 50 international and national sports bodies and competition organisers, with a particular focus on Intellectual property rights (IPR) issues. Our goal is to promote and protect our content to ensure the sustainable financing of the professional and grassroots sports that enhance our lives.

SROC members contribute substantially to the wealth and wellbeing of countries. We are key providers of long-term jobs, and some of the biggest tax-payers across the territories in which we operate.

As the majority of SROC members' revenues come from the sale of broadcast rights to our events, it is imperative that these rights are protected. This enables SROC members to continue to reinvest significant portions of their revenues back into grassroots, communities and throughout their individual sports. Indeed, without the revenue redistribution from organisers of commercially successful sporting events, the development of grassroots sports would suffer the loss of a critical source of financing.

Our members engage with governments and international organisations in order to explain the special nature of sports rights. They also seek proper recognition of the value of their sports from governments across the world, and effective protection for our rights under law.

To this end, since its inception, SROC and its members have been committed to constructive and collaborative engagement with European policymakers. We look forward to continuing this important work during the next mandate of the European institutions.

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<sup>1</sup>Sport In the European Union, European Commission, October 2021

# OUR ASKS OF EU DECISION-MAKERS

## Preserving territorial exclusivity

# 1

**Continue to support the freedom of sports events organisers to license our content on a territorial basis and maintain the current system of justified geo-enabling**

Sports are by their nature territorial. Whether it is a question of the popularity of a certain competition or sport in a particular geographical area or the focus of the commentary on a certain team or athlete, or simply the language in which it is delivered, SROC members' content is distributed across Europe on a territorial exclusive basis. This is evident in the so-called 'listed events' that are required to be shown on free-to-air television, as these differ from country to country, depending on local tastes and sporting priorities. Most importantly, territorial exclusive licensing is something that our broadcast partners want and expect.

Territorial exclusivity is and will continue to be the most efficient model for the sports sector as it suits the diversity of our business models and brings the greatest benefits to our consumers, as it

- enables consumers to enjoy quality offers that respond to local needs;

- generates revenues that sports bodies redistribute and invest in the further growth and development of their sports, particularly at grassroots and community level;

- enables stronger and fairer competition between broadcasters in Europe and prevents the largest media corporations from gaining disproportionate levels of market power; and

- benefits many commercial partners and local/national businesses who can seize the associated opportunities which arise from the diversity of advertising and sponsorship offers.

If the ability to legally geo-enable our content were to be removed, therefore ushering in a system of de facto pan-European licensing, consumers across the EU would likely pay more to access their content, which would inevitably be priced at the rate of its most valuable (i.e. almost always its domestic) market. Additionally, the variety of the content offered would be reduced, including the tailoring of content to individual markets, languages and geographies, as it would no longer be financially viable. Indeed, pan-European licensing would most likely be beneficial to the largest broadcasters, who often are not based in the EU. This would see many broadcasters, particularly those from Member States with smaller media markets, unable to compete and therefore lose significant revenues due to the lack of premium content available on their channels

**The cost of such a move has been projected to be €2 billion in lost revenue annually which equates to 15% of sporting revenues, and up to 26% revenue loss for less popular sports<sup>2</sup>. This would therefore have a heavy impact on the funding available for redistribution down the sporting pyramid.**

<sup>2</sup>The impact of potential changes to European geo-blocking regulation on sport, Oliver and Ohlbaum, January 2020



## Combating piracy

### 2 Adopt legislation to tackle illegal live content piracy, taking into account the impact of the 2023 European Commission Recommendation

Illegal online piracy of our members' content presents one of the greatest threats to our sector.

**It has been estimated that the annual global cost of piracy amounts to \$28 billion<sup>3</sup>.**

These are revenues that should be in the hands of the legitimate owners and creators of the content concerned, not in the hands of organised criminals. Further, this is not an issue that only affects pay TV broadcasts. Indeed, free-to-air television also experiences significant levels of piracy. It is therefore clear that the often-made insinuation that illegal piracy is inherently linked to an alleged lack of availability of content is simply not true.

For these reasons, SROC has long campaigned for greater policy action to tackle live content piracy. We welcomed the European Commission's Recommendation on combating online piracy of sports and other live events, published in May 2023 which acknowledges the specificity of live sports events. We are actively assessing the impact of this Recommendation. However, we continue to believe a legislative solution is necessary and will be the only effective remedy to hold pirates and their facilitators to account in order to put a stop to this scourge on our industry. This position has been echoed by Members of the European Parliament<sup>4</sup> and we remain hopeful that a legislative proposal will be brought forward following the conclusion of the assessment of the Recommendation in November 2025. As the European institutions have long stated, what is illegal offline should be illegal online and with regard to piracy, it is critical that the European rule of law is upheld in full.

<sup>3</sup>Pricing piracy: the value of action, Synamedia, March 2021

<sup>4</sup>Resolution on Challenges of sports events organisers in the digital environment, European Parliament, adopted 19 May 2021



## Protecting the European sport model

### 3 Continue to promote and protect sustainable and viable models of sports competitions in Europe, intending that sporting merit will be a relevant criteria for success and supporting athletes at every level from elite to grassroots

Europe has some of the world's most exciting sports competitions. Key to maintaining this excitement are the fundamental values of fairness, integrity and solidarity. This forms the basis of the sustainable and successful structure of sports governance in Europe that our members wholeheartedly support. SROC members are committed to promoting a model of earned success, ensuring that the best teams and athletes can rise to the highest levels, whilst ensuring that elite competitions organisers provide meaningful financial and practical support that trickles all the way down to the grassroots level.

## Ensuring fair and open connectivity

### 4 Resist calls for the introduction of telecommunications network fees, which will only have a detrimental impact on the European creative sector as a whole, including our members, and on consumers

In order to effectively and efficiently deliver content to consumers via our broadcast partners across Europe, SROC members are clearly supportive of strong, accessible and reliable digital connectivity. This is of critical importance to ensure that our content is delivered to consumers. Indeed, the competitions and events that our members organise are a significant driver of consumer take-up of telecoms services and offers across the EU. However, we firmly believe in the core principle of net neutrality and strongly reject any proposal for additional fees being levied on large-scale content creators.

Such fees would put additional financial pressures on our industry and remove significant revenue that could be reinvested in the sector. Further, we do not believe that the solution being proposed is addressing a real problem as there has proven to be sufficient data capacity to allow for high levels of traffic for decades to come, due to the ongoing expansion and upgradability of fibre networks. Indeed, the telecommunications industry's own regulator, the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), has been sceptical regarding the calls from some large Internet Service Providers for network fee payments, as "the internet has proven its ability to self-adapt to changing conditions, such as increasing traffic volume and changing demand patterns"<sup>5</sup>.

**In addition, a vast amount of the existing bandwidth across North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region, calculated at 23.8%, is used for illegal piracy<sup>6</sup>.**

Therefore, if there is a need to find additional network capacity, we firmly believe that the damages of piracy must be tackled as a first step.

<sup>5</sup>BEREC preliminary assessment of the underlying assumptions of payments from large CAPs to ISPs, BEREC, October 2022

<sup>6</sup>Piracy Is Back: Piracy Statistics for 2023, DataProt, July 2023

## Protecting the integrity of sports betting through official data

# 5

Set out in legislation compulsory criteria for sports betting licensees in Europe to only use official data sources to protect sports integrity and intellectual property

One of the key challenges faced by sports rights owners comes from the betting industry. The sports betting market in Europe is predicted to be worth over €82 billion by 2030<sup>7</sup>.

However, despite providing the raw material for a huge amount of revenue for bookmakers, sporting events' organisers do not receive any fair return.

One critical area through which sports organisers are able to protect the commercial exploitation of their competitions by gambling operators is through the licensing of official sports data. In recent years though, there has been an increasing prevalence of unofficial data sources providing their services at reduced rates, thus removing further revenues from the sports ecosystem which, as in other cases, could be reinvested down the pyramid.

SROC is therefore advocating for the creation of an obligation, preferably through European legislation, to require betting operators to only make use of official data sources when undertaking their economic activities.

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<sup>7</sup>Europe Sports Betting Market – Industry Trends and Forecast to 2030, Data Bridge Market Research, December 2022



# MEMBERS

