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## MINUTES | 33<sup>rd</sup> MEETING OF THE PROFESSIONAL HANDBALL BOARD

<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday, 9 April 2024	
<b>Time:</b>	08:30 – 13:00	
<b>Venue:</b>	Renaissance Wien Hotel   Strassburg I & II	
<b>Participants:</b>	X. O’Callaghan	Member MFCH   ESP   Chairman
	Nikolas Larsson	Member EHLB   SWE   Vice Chairman
	Mark Schober	Member NB   GER
	Gregor Planteu	Member MFCH   SLO
	M. S. Christensen	Member NB   DEN
	Torben Vinther	Member EHPU   DEN
	Predrag Bošković	Member EXEC   MNE
	Stefan Lövgren	Member EXEC   SWE
	Michael Wiederer	President
	Martin Hausleitner	Secretary General
<b>EHF Office:</b>	Markus Glaser	Chief Sports Officer
	Attila Heim	Manager National Team Competitions
	Marsha Brown	Corporate Liaison   Minutes
<b>Excused:</b>	Frank Bohmann	Member EHLB   GER
	Marcus Rominger	Member EHPU   GER

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### 1. Welcome and Introduction

Chairman O’ Callaghan welcomed the members to the session and moved directly into the agenda.

### 2. PHB Meeting 10/2023 – Minutes and Follow-up

With no additional comment or question, the minutes were adopted.

### 3. Stakeholder Reports

#### 3.1. EHF Nations Committee Men/Nations Board

NB Chairman, Mark Schober, informed on the many topics discussed some of which were not relevant to all stakeholders. Opening with the overwhelming success of the Men’s EHF EURO 2024 which saw over 1 million on-site spectators attend the events across the six venues. The Infront rights were sold out eight months prior to the event, the last rights element to be sold was the sleeve advertising. It was mentioned that the partnership with DeutscheBahn (DB) worked well in the organisational phase, but because of the rail strike, there were challenges.

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The PHB members congratulated the German Handball Federation and the European Handball Federation on the successful event.

The Nations Board also focused on the Younger Age Category (YAC) events where it was made clear that the focus would be on the development of the players, and the strategy of the YACs will be reviewed after two years.

Another topic discussed at length was that of image and personality rights; the NB were unified in the opinion that the Board is willing to help find a solution concerning these rights to be used by the EHF and the respective Organising Committees for the communication and promotion of the EURO events. To this end, Schober gave the example of the use of collective image rights. *The extended discussion within the PHB on 'Image & Personality Rights' is summarised under AP8 Other Topics.*

### **3.2. Men's Forum Club Handball**

MFCH Vice President, Gregor Planteu reported on the most recent activities of the group which included the 29<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of Forum Club Handball in Düsseldorf for the opening match of the EHF EURO. Representatives from 40 clubs from 21 nations. Clubs in USA and Australia were also involved at this meeting. The MFCH thanked the EHF for the invitation. Moreover, on 15 March in Vienna, the FCH (men and women) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Handball Agents Association (EHAA). The EHAA will publish a list of licensed agents, and the FCH will publish the information on the FCH-EHAA MoU and will place emphasis on the regulations in place and to be followed.

*The extended discussion on 'Player Agents & International Transfers' is summarised under AP8 Other Topics.*

### **3.3. European Handball League Board**

Nikolas Larsson, EHLB Chairman, informed the PHB on the extension of the MoU between the EHF and the EHLB, which will run until the end of the current electoral period (2025); the next election of persons to serve the league board will also take place. The third league summit organised by the EHLB will take place in Cologne once again on the fringes of the TruckScout24 Final4, combining the league summit with the business programme. The EHLB will endeavour to convene representatives from up to 20 leagues. To this end, the EHLB will also conduct its biannual digital outreach to the league representatives providing them with an update on the activities during the last period as well as a preview of upcoming undertakings.

The EHLB has also worked in close collaboration with the EHF on the preliminary steps to support the foundation of the Women's European Handball League Board (WEHLB) including the upcoming General Assembly in Budapest. This also included playing a significant role at the Women's League Convention in 2022.

In closing, the EHLB will reach out to the EHPU to discuss common issues in the coming period. Larsson also mentioned the current areas of focus for the leagues include topics such as the full hall initiative and digital marketing, i.e. how to reach agreements to expand the reach of the national league matches and increase income, as the resources of leagues differ around Europe. Therefore, the increased use of digital platforms could offer more possibilities to attain these objectives such as streaming more matches at a lower cost.

### **3.4. European Handball Players' Union**

EHPU President, Torben Vinther noted that some of the topics already mentioned by other stakeholders reflected topics of interest within the EHPU. He revisited the ongoing issue of the match schedule being intensive for the best players and stated that the gap between regular national league players and top international players was too wide resulting in a situation that is unsustainable. But Vinther was also clear on the point that the solution must not be to cut the national league products, as most of the development, education, etc. comes via the national league activities. Though at this time, no solution to this matter is readily available, Vinther intoned that it cannot be ignored.

It was also mentioned that the EHPU representatives partook in the most recent working group concerning the resin free ball, which has been scheduled for testing at an upcoming YAC WC in China.

EHPU is currently engaging in the topic of pregnancy and maternity leave with the focus on making the matter more integrated; the EHPU sees an urgency of the topic based on the accounts of player experiences.

In closing, Vinther expressed the objective of having EHPU included in the WHB framework; responding, the EHF – after recapitulating how players are currently represented in the WHB, as well as the steps taken to establish the WEHLB – stated that the formal process needed to start.

## **4. National Team Competitions**

In addition to the information provided during the common meeting (see notes), the matter of the possible adaptation to the playing system for the Women's EHF EURO 2026, CSO Glaser only gave a brief outline of the situation as it is a WHB topic and not a PHB topic. Furthermore, no changes are foreseen in the men's national team events for the upcoming EHF EUROs.

## **5. Club Competitions**

5.1. Season 2023/2024 | General Information

5.2. Season 2024/2025 | General Information

Please refer to the minutes of the common meeting.

### 5.3. Season 2024/2025 | Preview

FCH added, for transparency and the record, that within the stakeholder group the discussion of throw-off times continues as requested by its member clubs. It was reiterated that any changes that could only be implemented as of the 2026/2027 season and discussions would have to start soon. EHLB registered their interest in being part of the discussions to have a good process and all stakeholders involved.

The written request from the French league (LNH) to play matches after the conclusion of the EHF Final4(s) was mentioned; the issue is caused by the timing of the Olympic Games and affects the women's competition. LNH was subsequently informed that this was not permitted in accordance with the current agreement with the stakeholders.

## 6. Other Competition Related Topics

### 6.1. EHF Officiating System

### 6.2. Technical Services

Commenting on the information previously given during the common meeting, Chairman O'Callaghan voiced his wish to see all available regularly technologies used and implemented, this included the 'Coaches' Challenge.' It was noted that following the first year of implementation, the EHF will conduct an evaluation of the how the technologies and tools were used, and the results will be analysed for a follow-up.

### 6.3. IHF Regulations | Follow-Up

Please refer to the minutes of the common meeting.

## 7. Calendar | Meetings | Activities

### 7.1. Competitions Calendars 2024/2025 & 2025/2026

Please refer to the minutes of the common meeting.

### 7.2. Meeting Calendar 2024 | Update

There will be a new format to the 2024 EHF Excellence Awards with major focus on the legends. Also, it was mentioned that the location of some meetings would change.

## 8. Other Topics

### *Image & Personality Rights*

The topic was mentioned during the report of the Nations Board (see AP3.1.). Secretary General Hausleitner added that there was a need for the partners/sponsors/presenters to use images of players; here the example of 'Grundfos' (partner of the 'Player of the Match' award) was elaborated as to why this topic remains open. Hausleitner suggested that there was a need for a collective offer from the players, and that a baseline as well as a compromise needed to be found, as a negative response from the players would lead to a dead end.

The complexity of the topic was illustrated through the various points:

- A national federation cannot sign a blanket agreement relinquishing image rights of its national team to the competition organiser.
- The integration of a ‘partner/sponsor interaction’ clause was also not possible as it would work differently and have different consequences at the national team and club team level.
- Due to the nature of the topic, the players would have to be a part of the discussion, as looking to the future, the question of data handling would become increasingly important. The male players have a union, the female players do not; thus, there would be no barrier to a partner/sponsor approaching a female player directly.
- National Federations and clubs hold the rights to the players image when that player is wearing the national team or club team jersey/kit; they do not hold personality rights. As it covers several layers, the situation is more complex at the national team level.
- There is a clear difference between image rights for ‘goodwill’ purposes and those of ‘commercialisation;’ and despite the intended goodwill, a commercial value remains.
- Currently, the EHF/NF does not pay a player for the image rights. Moreover, the financial compensation to a player for image/personality rights cannot be compared to other team sports; a level appropriate to handball was called for. Compensation should not be seen as an additional event income, but rather in terms of principle recognition towards a player.
- The EHPU representing the players in the PHB does not have a mandate in this topic as there is not a broad representation of the players partaking in a EURO with the EHPU.

In the search for harmonisation, the PHB conceded the complexity of the topic that must be analysed of the legalities. As it was clear that a blanket solution would not work, the PHB agreed to the suggestion that the EHF needed to formulate what was needed from the player by defining what was necessary, including the context of event communication and promotion, and to what degree partners/sponsors could make use the events in the future, and would this look like collective or individual agreements. This would have to be communicated to the players. The PHB also suggested convening a working group comprised of the relevant experts which included members of the stakeholder groups. To conclude, the topic remains open and will be further discussed resp. treated.

### *Player Agents & International Transfers*

The topic was mentioned during the report of the Men's Forum Club Handball (see AP3.2.). During the report, it was underlined that in accordance with the current IHF Regulations on International Transfers, a player could not sign a new contract with a club if there were 12 months or more remaining on the current valid contract.

In addition, agents play a relevant role as the recipient of the service provided by an agent would have to pay accordingly. To the agreement signed between the FCH and EHAA, all agents registered with the EHAA are required to be licensed. Players and clubs are prohibited from engaging the services of an unlicensed agent. The FCH-EHAA MoU is formulated in accordance with the IHF Regulations.

Concern was raised about the licensing system, how it is overseen, and the seemingly lack of consequences for non-compliance. It was stressed that non-compliance will see the agent being stricken from the EHAA approved list. Moreover, it was intoned that the national federations and clubs, when registering a new player, could also act in a safeguarding capacity to proof that a contract has been concluded in compliance with the regulations.

The PHB agreed that the broader spectrum of stakeholders, for the sake of transparency, are to be fully informed on the correct implementation of regulations and where the responsibilities lay in the case of sanctionable transgressions.

Due to the recent cases, a clarification with the IHF is needed to which degree the IHF will work on violations of the regulations.

### **9. Miscellaneous**

Taking the registration process of the handball business programme held within the framework of the TruckScout24 Final4, the PHB enquired as to when the invitations to the event(s) in Cologne would be distributed. This enquiry will be followed up and the EHF will contact EHFMM accordingly.

With the agenda concluded, PHB Chairman O'Callaghan closed the meeting with his thanks to the members for their contributions.