

# **Europe must not miss the opportunity to protect the rights of sports fans, players and organisers**

*By Mark Lichtenhein, Chairman of the Sports Rights Owners Coalition (SROC)*

Earlier this month I watched the flutter of European flags over the course in Guyancourt, outside Paris, at the close of the Ryder Cup and I couldn't help but feel pride once more at the unifying power of sport. Given the current political upheaval, including the rise of Euroscepticism and populism across the continent and the looming shadow of Brexit, the resounding victory of the European team over our transatlantic cousins in such a unique and prestigious competition comes at a particularly challenging time for Europe. Despite this, I could not fail to be moved by the chants throughout the crowd of 'Europe! Europe! Europe!' from continentals and Brits alike. It is this unifying power that makes sport so special and something worth protecting.

As was so visible as that last putt was sunk and the crowd cheered, sport transcends nations, religions, ethnic origins and people of all ages. Sport plays a crucial role in Europe socially, educationally and economically and in order for this to be exploited to its full potential, it is vital to protect the revenues that enable investment in professional and grassroots sports. The majority of these revenues come from the sale of media rights to cover major competitions.

As such, the members of the Sports Rights Owners Coalition (SROC) that I chair rely on their competitions being protected from copyright infringement in order to preserve their value. Without a robust, updated and enforceable copyright framework, both offline and online, the revenues they receive and pump back into grassroots projects will be at risk.

Much to my disappointment as a passionate advocate for the game, golf has not always been seen as accessible to everyone. However, in recent years that view has begun to change dramatically, due to golf's regained Olympic status, coupled with wider coverage of tournaments on television and online. This in turn has driven interest in golf and has seen more people pick up clubs and have a go themselves. In addition to changing perceptions, the growing revenues from TV rights sales has enabled greater funding at grassroots level – particularly through the initiatives of the [Ryder Cup European Development Trust](#), increasing the accessibility of golf for all. This is the case across all sports which benefit from licensing revenues and are therefore able to put money back into developing the next generation of sporting legends.

SROC was therefore very happy to see the European Parliament coming to a good position in support of creators and rightsholders through its recent adoption of the draft Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market. Contrary to much of the media coverage around it, this legislation is designed to enable creators to thrive in the digital economy, not to reject innovation. As technology moves forward and the way in which people consume their entertainment content continues to change, these protections are becoming even more fundamental to ensuring the future of Europe's creative industries.

Now that the European institutions are in the process of finalising this important file and with the EU elections coming up next year, it is vital to reaffirm the need to protect the value of sports. This principle enables sports organisers to continue to bring people together, provide entertainment for consumers and support players at all levels for many years to come.