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Assessment of the Institutional Capacity of Sport Regarding the Implementation of the Peacebuilding Function Under Conditions of Armed Conflicts

The institutional capacity of sport in the field of peacebuilding is studied. The Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict (war) is chosen as the main case for characterizing the peacebuilding potential of the institution of sports. The working hypotheses are verified about: (1) the dependence of the implementation of the peacebuilding function by the sports institution on the characteristics of a specific foreign policy conflict (severity, level of aggression, differences in the values of the parties, the scale of victims and destruction, etc.); (2) the difference between the nature of the peacebuilding role of the sports institution and the current stage of relations between the opposing parties (open armed aggression, tension, post-conflict restoration of relations, etc.). It is proved that the sports institution is capable of being an active subject of democratic peacebuilding processes, but can also become a puppet tool of undemocratic governments that implement an aggressive foreign policy.

Keywords: sport, peacebuilding, peacemaking potential of sport, institutional capacity of sport, weaponization of sport, public diplomacy, sports diplomacy.

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Оцінка інституційної спроможності спорту щодо реалізації миробудівничої функції в умовах збройних конфліктів

Досліджено інституційну спроможність спорту у сфері миробудівництва. Основним кейсом для характеристики миробудівничого потенціалу інституту спорту обрано російсько-український збройний конфлікт (війну). Верифіковано робочі гіпотези про: 1) узалежненість реалізації інститутом спорту миробудівничої функції від характеристик конкретного зовнішньополітичного конфлікту (гострота, рівень агресії, розбіжності в цінностях сторін, масштаби жертв і руйнувань тощо); 2) відмінність характеру миробудівничої ролі інституту спорту від поточного етапу взаємин сторін протистояння (відкрита збройна агресія, напруга, післяконфліктне відновлення відносин і т. ін.). Доведено, що інститут спорту здатен як бути активним суб'єктом демократичних процесів миробудівництва, так і може ставати інструментом-маріонеткою недемократичних урядів, які реалізують агресивну зовнішню політику. Відзначено, що хоч світова спортивна спільнота послідовно декларує цінність миру, однак не має сильної політичної волі у протидії державам-агресорам, а частина держав, інтегрованих у світовий спорт, підривають інституційну спроможність спорту виступати ефективним суб'єктом миробудівництва. Підкреслено, що й в умовах збройного протистояння держав можуть бути ефективними такі миробудівничі інструменти інституту спорту, як публічна критика держав-агресорів за політизацію спорту; лобіювання ізоляції держав-агресорів зі світового спорту або ж посилення обмежень щодо них; формування громадської думки спільноти уболівальників про природу того чи іншого міжнародного конфлікту, війни; мобілізація фінансових ресурсів (краудфандингові проєкти і под.) на гуманітарні потреби держави, які потерпають від зовнішньої агресії і т. ін.

Ключові слова: спорт, миробудівництво, миротворчий потенціал спорту, інституційна спроможність спорту, вепонізація спорту, публічна дипломатія, спортивна дипломатія.

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Statement of the scientific problem and its significance. The rising number of international conflicts and wars, and the increasing fragility of the global security architecture are the reasons for the greater attention to the peacebuilding potential of non-political social institutions. Sport has long been one of these institutions (since Antiquity). Given the rapid increase in the number of actors in international relations that are instruments of soft power, the institution of sports has repeatedly demonstrated its peacebuilding potential. However, it is necessary to examine how successfully and under what conditions this potential of sport can be realized in situations of acute confrontation between states. It is not about the broad socio-political role of the institution of sports in general, but rather about its peacebuilding function under the conditions of open aggression of some states against others. For Ukraine, which is facing Russian aggression, the issue of the institutional capacity of sport (as well as other social institutions) to fight for peace is extremely important.

At first glance, sport can demonstrate its constructive potential not under conditions of armed aggression, but primarily under "softer" conditions, such as tension in bilateral relations, post-conflict normalization of relations between states, etc. Having no doubt about the enormous potential of sport for rapprochement, understanding, reconciliation, and deepening of cooperation between nations, we focus on the conditions of armed confrontation, or war. Hence, we will find out whether the institution of sports can realize its peacebuilding orientation under such conditions and in what modern formats it can be implemented.

The statement of the problem therefore consists in determining the potential of the institution of sports as a peacebuilding tool under the conditions of armed confrontation between states (war).

Analysis of the latest research on the problem. The issue of the influence of the institution of sports on the sphere of international politics, in particular the issue of peacebuilding, is the subject of active scientific discussion. The topic of the peacebuilding role of the institution of sports is raised on the pages of specialized scientific publications such as the International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, *Sport in Society*, *Journal of Global Sport Management*, etc. The *Journal of Sport for Development* has a thematic section Sport and Peace. In the context of particular acuteness and international tension surrounding the 2024 Olympics, the issue has acquired a new meaning.

S. Reynard formulates a key research question: "Is sport a peacebuilding tool?" "Sport as a peacebuilding tool?"[2]. Researchers (I. Beutler, J.A. Bromberg, P. Burke, D.C. Coates, J. Dart, P. Donnelly, R. Giulianotti, B. Goff, B. Kidd, J. Parry, R. Redeker, M. Schnitzer, M. Simpson, Y. Stivachtis, C. Szto, Z. Ubaidulloev, L. Zanotti, etc.) study the history, the modern role of sport for development and peace, assess the effectiveness of UN programs and various levels of sports organizations in communities that are parties to an international conflict or post-conflict, etc.

At the same time, the issue of the weaponization of sport has not been sufficiently investigated[3], although these processes have been on the rise for a long time due to the destructive policies of neo-authoritarian states. Also, a few studies examine the peacebuilding orientation of sport in the acute phase of interstate conflicts and wars. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has created a research field for exploring the peacebuilding potential of the institution of sports. Currently, the first steps are being taken in clarifying the peacebuilding capabilities of the institution of sports precisely in the context of armed conflicts and wars. The analysis of historiography on the issues of this study demonstrated the lack of scientific works that characterize the peacebuilding potential of the institution of sports on the example of the Russian-Ukrainian armed confrontation (war).

Statement of the purpose and objectives of the article. The purpose of the article is to determine the effectiveness of the institution of sports as a peacebuilding tool under the conditions of long-term armed aggression of some states against others. The purpose is achieved through the following research objectives: to reveal the potential of the institution of sports as a tool of peacebuilding; and to analyse the institutional capacity of sport in the field of peacebuilding in times of war (on the example of Russian aggression against Ukraine).

The research methodology. The research methodology is based on institutional and axiological analysis. The study examines a complex of actions, decisions, and positions of international and national sports institutions in terms of peacebuilding. At this stage, the first steps are being taken to clari-

[2] Reynard, S. 2020. Sport as a Peacebuilding Tool? *Peace Review*, 32(4), p. 448.
[3] Coates, D.C. 2017. Weaponization of Sports: The Battle for World Influence Through Sporting Success. *The Independent Review*, 22(2): 215-221.

fy the peacebuilding capabilities of the institution of sports under the conditions of armed conflicts and wars. The analysis of historiography on the issues of this study showed the absence of scientific works that characterize the peacebuilding potential of the institution of sports on the example of the Russian-Ukrainian armed confrontation (war). The working **hypotheses** of the research are assumptions about: (1) the dependence of the implementation of the peacebuilding function by the sports institution on the characteristics of a specific foreign policy conflict (severity, level of aggression, differences in the values of the parties, the scale of victims and destruction, etc.); (2) the difference between the nature of the peacebuilding function of the sports institution and the current stage of relations between the conflicting parties (open armed aggression, post-conflict restoration of relations, etc.).

Presentation of the main material. Researchers draw attention to the fact that over the past two decades, the international community has increasingly recognized and used the power of sport as "a means to promote development and peace"[4], "as an interventionist tool to nurture peacemaking"[5], "an intervention tool in order to pursue wider, non-sporting social goals"[6], a "powerful tool to promote peace, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence"[7]. The "peacemaking capacity of sport, which informs its peacekeeping potential"[8] is proved. P. de Coubertin[9], the French figure who initiated the revival of the Olympic Games, praised sport as peace with poetic lines ("Ode to Sport"). However, it should be noted that in the scientific discourse, there is not only an optimistic but also a restrained view[10] of sport as a tool of foreign policy, diplomacy, soft power, etc. in terms of achieving peace by states in a state of armed conflict or war.

Sport has manifested itself as a tool of international interactions since Antiquity. Since 2013, the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace has been celebrated every year on April 6 at the initiative of the United Nations. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders in 2015, confirmed that sport is "an important factor for sustainable development"[11]. In the assessment of the UN[12] and several other international organizations, sports should serve peace and development, can mitigate socio-cultural differences between people and nations and counteract aggression, and sports events can become platforms for uniting alienated states.

Currently, on the initiative of Qatar, under the auspices of the UN, a special international initiative "Sport for Development and Peace" is being implemented. Its goal is, particularly, to "promote peace, through advocacy for the recognition and use of sports as an effective tool in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts and to support field programs that show, in a tangible way, development and social impact of sport"[13]. Thus, international institutions unconditionally state the effectiveness of sport in peacebuilding. However, such a conclusion should not be considered universal, be-

[4] Beutler, I. 2008. Sport serving development and peace: Achieving the goals of the United Nations through sport. *Sport in Society*, 11(4): 359-369; Kidd, B. 2008. A new social movement: Sport for development and peace. *Sport in Society*, 11(4): 370-380.

[5] Giulianotti, R. 2011. Sport, peacemaking and conflict resolution: a contextual analysis and modelling of the sport, development and peace sector. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34(2), p. 207.

[6] Giulianotti, R., Hognestad, H. & Spaaij, R. 2016. Sport for Development and Peace: Power, Politics, and Patronage. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 1(3-4), p. 129.

[7] Ubaidulloev, Z. 2018. Sport for Peace: A New Era of International Cooperation and Peace Through Sport. *Asia-Pacific Review*, 25(2), p. 104.

[8] Parry, J. 2012. The power of sport in peacemaking and peacekeeping. *Sport in Society*, 15(6), p. 775.

[9] Ode to Sport by Pierre de Coubertin. *Poetry in Surrey Libraries.* Available at: <https://npdsurrey.wordpress.com/2020/09/19/ode-to-sport-by-pierre-de-coubertin/> [Accessed 30 March 2024].

[10] Redeker, R. 2008. Sport as an opiate of international relations: The myth and illusion of sport as a tool of foreign policy. *Sport in Society*, 11: 494-500; Simpson, M. 2011. Trailing the Olympic epic: black modernity and the Athenian arena, 2004. In: B. Goff & M. Simpson, eds. *Thinking the Olympics: the classical tradition and the modern games*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, pp. 171-189.

[11] Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: resolution. UN. General Assembly (70th sess.: 2015-2016). 2015. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3923923?ln=en&v=pdf> [Accessed 14 March 2024].

[12] International Day of Sport for Development and Peace: resolution. UN. General Assembly (67th sess.: 2012-2013) 2013. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/757105?ln=en&v=pdf> [Accessed 15 March 2024].

[13] Sport for Development and Peace. 2023. *United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs.* Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/sport-development-and-peace-sdp> [9 March 2024].

cause the effectiveness of the peacebuilding function of the institution of sports should be assessed in each specific conflict case.

We agree that sport "may make a useful contribution to work in international development and peacebuilding"[14]. In our opinion, however, the extent of such a contribution depends on the political will of the representatives of the sports community, as well as the content, depth, nature of a particular conflict, value differences of the parties and other factors. The analysis of complex conflict cases[15] proves that sport is not always capable of acting as a peacebuilding tool between the parties to the conflict, although it has certain important levers of influence even under conditions of armed confrontation. Additionally, while "sport can indeed serve useful roles in development and peacebuilding, […] it does not constitute a substitute for developing social norms and values that conduce to mutual tolerance and shared commitment to non-violent conflict management"[16].

The state of war and armed aggression in interstate relations socially activates athletes and sports institutions, and all parties to the confrontation. Hence, both constructive (peacebuilding) and destructive (militant propaganda) roles of the institution of sports are possible, depending on the type of political regime, and the dominant values of states that are parties to an armed conflict (war).

The position of sports organizations, individual athletes, sports journalists and commentators can indirectly shape public opinion about certain processes in the international arena. This refers to indirect influence on citizens who do not show interest in international politics, but have a persistent interest, for example, in watching sports broadcasts. For example, the departure of athletes from established ritual actions during competitions may raise questions among consumers of sports content about the motivation for this or that behaviour of athletes. This may bring them into a wider political context if the issue receives attention from sports commentators. We mean such examples of protest activism by athletes as refusal to shake hands, communicate or take joint photos during the awards ceremony, reluctance to answer journalists' questions in the language of the aggressor state, etc.

Sport is traditionally associated with equality, healthy competitiveness, the socially active position of athletes, etc. in democratic societies. Instead, in non-democratic states, athletes and sports institutions often become puppets of the state propaganda machine. Nevertheless, even under the conditions of democracy, due to a decrease in its quality, differences between declared and real values and principles are noticeable. For example, in the context of full-scale Russian aggression, Ukrainian athletes repeatedly encountered a situation when foreign athletes and international sports organizations declared democratic values and, at the same time, advocated for the autonomy of sports and politics. As a result, there is no solidarity in the world sport regarding restrictions for Russian and Belarusian athletes. The fact that Russian and Belarusian sports are closely connected with the state apparatus through the army (athletes belong to military sports clubs, they have military ranks) and funding is not taken into account. This testifies to the ambivalence of the political and legal culture, the contradictory combination of democratic and neo-authoritarian values and principles of the actors belonging to the institution of sports. Hence, it affects the overall institutional capacity of sport as a peacebuilding tool.

Nowadays, the personal value position of an athlete acquires special importance and is socially significant. Due to this, even quite conservative international sports institutions are changing the established rules. For example, in 2023, the International Fencing Federation (FIE) changed the rules of athletes' behaviour after the match when the Ukrainian athlete O. Kharlan refused to shake hands with the Russian fencer: the traditional handshake is allowed to be replaced by a distant greeting, which allows the representatives of the warring countries not to get close. In such actions and changes, we also see the contribution of the institution of sports to peacebuilding.

The voices of famous athletes are extremely important in the struggle for peace, as they are considered by numerous people to be leaders of public opinion. Outstanding athletes are role models for many, and they have significant potential to bring about social change through sport. Their powerful voices can advocate for more inclusive and peaceful societies. Being public figures with millions of supporters, athletes have a unique platform that can be used to promote peace and anti-war messages.

[14] Donnelly, P., Atkinson, M., Boyle, S. & Szto, C. 2011. Sport for Development and Peace: a public sociology perspective. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(3), p. 589.
[15] Dart, J. 2022. Sport and Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 7(2): 267-288.
[16] Schnitzer, M., Stephenson, M. Jr., Zanotti, L. & Stivachtis, Y. 2013. Theorizing the role of sport for development and peacebuilding. *Sport in Society*, 16(5), p. 595.

Through social networks, organization of crowdfunding projects, participation in charity events, etc. athletes with a world name broadcast certain socio-political narratives to the audience of their fans. Athletes who have huge fan bases are able to influence society by broadcasting their views. Fans often tend to solidarize with the positions of famous athletes on a wide range of social issues. In this context, importantly, the silence of athletes on high-profile topics (war, peace, etc.) can become a role model for their fans, forming their indifference.

In the context of the social and political activism of athletes, Ukraine has many positive examples. Thus, within the framework of V. Zelenskyy's United24 presidential initiative, among the ambassadors called to organize charity meetings, there are well-known athletes: football player and coach A. Shevchenko, football player O. Zinchenko, boxer O. Usyk, tennis player E. Svitolina. In order to collect aid for the reconstruction projects of Ukraine, many charitable events were held with the participation of athletes, and the accumulated funds were directed to specific (mainly humanitarian) needs, which were actualized precisely as a result of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

However, there are also opposite examples when athletes support armed aggression and open fundraising to help the army of the aggressor state. For example, the athletes of the Russian volleyball team (Olympic champions of 2012) held a fundraiser for the needs of the Russian army in 2023 as part of the activities of Putin's pro-government foundation "Everything for Victory!". Essentially, against the background of the emergence of public information about this collection, the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) expressed its opposition to the war and the inadmissibility of using athletes as an instrument of conflict and division[17].

It should be noted that the reaction of international sports institutions to the involvement of athletes in state propaganda pro-war campaigns is in many cases not a statement of their active position, but usually a response to the request of third parties. Nowadays, the parties that attract public opinion and demand an appropriate reaction are most often Ukrainian government institutions. It is not uncommon for international sports institutions to fail to respond appropriately and promptly to the pro-war involvement of athletes and even to violate the recommendations on the neutrality of athletes from aggressor states in order to allow them to participate in international competitions. Concurrently, the peacebuilding policy must be consistent and express the political will of international sports institutions.

The Olympic Games are of special importance for the realization of the peacebuilding role of the institution of sports. Their role is important not only in the context of uniting different nations for interaction but also taking into account the Olympic Truce. The institution of the Olympic Truce ("ékécheiria") dates back to Antiquity when the participants of such sports competitions were required to stop wars during the games and to hold peace talks in Olympia to settle the conflict. This formed the ideology of these sports competitions. P. de Coubertin, one of the founders of the modern Olympics, believed that international sports and competitions are one of the most effective tools for overcoming differences between nations and, as a result, preventing future wars[18]. In 1992, the International Olympic Committee initiated the revival of the Olympic Truce tradition from the 1994 Winter Olympics. All states were urged to observe it[19]. J. A. Bromberg called the revived practice of the Olympic Truce a "political tool for promoting peace through sport"[20]. The International Olympic Truce Centre has been operating since 2020.

Still, is the Olympic Truce effective under the conditions of the current global security challenges and the scale of armed aggression of some states against others? Let us point out two reasons that reduce the effectiveness of the Olympic Truce institution:

[17] Burke, P. 2023. Russian London 2012 gold medal-winning volleyball team help raise funds to buy ammunition for Ukraine war. *Inside the Games*. Available at: <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1140983/khety-collection-fund-ukraine> [Accessed 19 March 2024].

[18] Bromberg, J.A. 2021. Sport and peace: Panhellenic myth-making and the modern Olympics. In: S. Papaioannou, A. Serafim & M. Edwards, eds. *Brill's Companion to the reception of rhetoric*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 356-378; Bromberg, J.A. 2023. Peace through sport: from ancient sources to modern practice. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Clássicos*, 36, pp. 1-26.

[19] Observance of the Olympic Truce: resolution. UN. General Assembly (48th sess.: 1993-1994). 1993. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/197368?ln=en&v=pdf> [Accessed 30 March 2024].

[20] Bromberg, J.A. 2020. Pax Olympica? The rhetoric and ideology of the olympic truce. In: R. Álvarez, G.B. Ferrer, J.F.G. Calderon *et al,*. eds. *La paz: perspectivas antiguas sobre un tema actual*. Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, pp. 267-296.

1. Non-binding, advisory nature of the Olympic Truce for states. While there were no cases of violation of the Olympic Truce in Ancient Greece, in modern times violations are recorded during each of these competitions. For example, wars such as the Bosnian war (1992–1995), the wars in Afghanistan (2001–2021), Iraq (2003–2011), the Russo-Georgian war (2008), the Russo-Ukrainian war (since 2014), etc. took place during the Olympics. Concerning the current moment, it should be noted that although France announced its preliminary intention to appeal to Russia regarding the cessation of hostilities in Ukraine during the 2024 Olympics, Russia rejected this possibility in advance.

2. Significant restrictions on participation in the Olympics by athletes from aggressor states. The 2024 Olympics may not be a period of truce, but rather a new factor of tension and destabilization due to the participation of Russian and Belarusian individual athletes. From Ukraine's point of view, Russian and Belarusian athletes, even in a formally neutral status, should not compete at the Olympics. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, "the International Olympic Committee has effectively given Russia the green light to weaponize the Olympics. There is no doubt that the Kremlin will use every Russian and Belarusian athlete as a weapon in its propaganda warfare"[21]. At the same time, the IOC itself has come under pressure not only from Ukraine and the states that are in solidarity with it on this issue (Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, etc.), but also from Russia, and to a lesser extent from Belarus. In fact, Russia considers the IOC's decisions to be unlawful, discriminatory, humiliating, etc., and the IOC's activities are characterized as the ones which "divide and politicise the international sports movement but also turn the IOC […] into a tool for unfair competition…"[22]. In this situation, it is obvious that there will be no truce for the 2024 Olympics. On the contrary, these competitions have a high conflict potential.

It must be emphasised that Ukraine actively uses sport to protect its national interests through numerous institutional initiatives. They are justified given the entire complex of external threats and risks to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. For example:

– establishment by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine of a working group for the coordination of actions aimed at preventing representatives of Russia and Belarus from participating in international sports competitions;

– a ban on official delegations of Ukrainian national teams in Olympic, non-Olympic sports and sports for people with disabilities to participate in international sports competitions in which athletes from Russia and Belarus take part. However, in 2023, adjustments were made: the ban applies to those competitions where Russians and Belarusians perform under their national flags, and/or use national symbols, and/or their public actions and statements express their affiliation with Russia or Belarus;

– identification, through constant monitoring, of those Russian and Belarusian athletes who publicly support military aggression (appeals, photos, etc.) or belong to military formations; taking measures to exclude these athletes from participation in international sports events;

– a ban on the implementation by members of Ukrainian official delegations of national teams of actions that can be interpreted as a manifestation of solidarity with representatives of Russia and/or Belarus (greetings, photographing, etc.).

Consequently, we see a constructed institutional mechanism regarding: (1) exclusion of athletes, coaches, and other representatives of aggressor states from participation in international sports competitions if they identify themselves with their states; (2) strengthening measures to prevent propaganda of military aggression by Russia against Ukraine among the international sports community; (3) determination of behavioural models for Ukrainian athletes during joint competitions with the participation of Russian and/or Belarusian athletes (in a neutral status).

Such institutional decisions became one of Ukraine's responses to the violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. They are aimed at limiting the capabilities of the aggressor states, and therefore they can be fully considered peacebuilding. In general, the case of Ukraine allows us to take a fresh look at the role of sport under the conditions of armed confrontation between states. With the help of sanctions, the institution of sports demonstrates its institutional capacity to act as a peacebuild-

[21] Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the decision of the IOC to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to participate in competitions in neutral status. 2023. Available at: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/zayava-mzs-ukrayini-shchodo-rishennya-mok-dozvoliti-rosijskim-ta-biloruskim-sportsmenam-brati-uchast-v-zmagannyah-v-nejtralnomu-statusi> [Accessed 27 March 2024].

[22] Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova (Moscow, March 20, 2024). 2024. Available at: <https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1939920/#09> [Accessed 20 March 2024].

ing tool, but not through the activation of cooperation in the field of sports (as is traditionally the case), but through limiting the participation of those who are the bearers of aggression.

Despite the restrictions that were imposed on Russian and Belarusian athletes after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the International Olympic Committee still recommended that they be admitted to the 2024 Olympics, provided they do not support the war[23]. Also, such individual athletes are allowed to participate in some other competitions (such as the Wimbledon tournament). Several states opposed such a decision, and protest actions took place, but they were not powerful enough to achieve greater restrictions. Even though the IOC's position applies only to Russian and Belarusian athletes who have not formally discredited themselves by supporting the war, it has created opportunities for abuse. For example, in 2024, the international federations of gymnastics, judo, taekwondo, tennis, water sports, equestrian sports, etc. admitted Russian and Belarusian athletes who actually support aggression against Ukraine to compete. This violated the recommendations on the neutrality of athletes from aggressor states who were admitted to international competitions. The National Olympic Committee of Ukraine and government institutions of Ukraine shall immediately report the discovery of such facts.

The fact that Russians not only continue to participate in competitions but also head sports institutions, such as the Amateur International Boxing Association, the International Chess Federation, etc. reduces the peacebuilding capabilities of the international institution of sports. Noteworthy, it was representatives of international sports federations who lobbied the IOC for the admission of Russian and Belarusian athletes under a neutral flag to the 2024 Olympics.

We assume that this situation is the result of the still strong pro-Russian lobby in the international arena. Russia still retains leverage over certain international sports organizations. Big business (VTB Bank, Gazprom, etc.) has been sponsoring federations of various sports for a long time, although under the conditions of full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine, there are many examples of refusal of Russian funding. This makes it possible for Russia, even under the conditions of an aggressive foreign policy course, to remain to a certain extent integrated into the world sports processes.

Russia used and continues to use sports as a tool of information warfare, propaganda and masking the redistribution of financial flows of its state institutions and sanctioned organizations. That is, sport is used to fuel military aggression and financial crimes. The "War and Sport" initiative of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention on the "War and Sanctions"[24] portal is aimed at countering this. There is a list of athletes, sports federations, associations, clubs, sponsors and other sports organizations from different countries that directly or indirectly support Russia.

In international politics, the topic of sport is often speculative and pragmatically used by states, depending on current foreign policy interests. For example, in the second year of the full-scale Russian aggression in Ukraine within the framework of UN events, a representative of the aggressor state voiced theses about the role of sport as a powerful tool for peace and development[25]. What is important, such speeches do not lead to an active discussion in response or debates in international institutions. Another example of cynicism is Russia's official invitations of individual all-Ukrainian sports federations to the 2024 World Friendship Games.

In the context of a full-scale war, Ukraine's efforts to use sport in the struggle for peace and to create pressure on aggressor states often do not receive sufficient support from international sports institutions. In the activities of international sports institutions, there are still some contradictions between the declared peacebuilding role of sport and the insufficient political will to use sport to oppose states that commit or support aggression in the international arena. The reason for this, not least, should be seen in the deep integration of such states as Russia into international sports structures, developed networks of connections, long-term sponsorship and, not excluded, corruption schemes, etc. As a con-

[23] Statement on solidarity with Ukraine, sanctions against Russia and Belarus, and the status of athletes from these countries (2023). *International Olympic Committee.* Available at: <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/statement-on-solidarity-with-ukraine-sanctions-against-russia-and-belarus-and-the-status-of-athletes> [Accessed 24 March 2024].

[24] State Sanctions Registry. 2024. Available at: <https://drs.nsdc.gov.ua/> [Accessed 10 March 2024].

[25] UN Global Sports Programme Holds Discussion on Role of Youth in Preventing Violent Extremism through Sport During Counter-Terrorism Week 2023. Available at: <https://www.unaoc.org/2023/06/un-global-sports-programme-holds-discussion-on-role-of-youth-in-preventing-violent-extremism-through-sport-during-counter-terrorism-week/> [Accessed 11 March 2024].

sequence, it is now difficult for states that suffer from external aggression to return justice to international sport. Change in this situation requires the political will of the relevant international institutions.

Conclusions. The issue of the peacebuilding potential of sport (as well as art, education, and other social institutions) is gaining more and more importance due to the growing challenges to global security and international tension. Nowadays, there are many examples of the effective peacebuilding role of sport, bringing people together through sports interactions. However, the institution of sports is capable of not only being an active subject of democratic peacebuilding processes but also becoming a puppet tool of the aggressive policies of undemocratic governments. Although the international sports community consistently declares the value of peace, these declarations often do not receive practical implementation in the politics of non-democratic states. Moreover, the international sports community is currently not stable and consistent enough to prevent individual states from using sports and athletes for undemocratic political purposes. Given the scale of the current confrontation between states with fundamentally different values, the institutional capacity of sport needs to be strengthened in order to enable the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives.

The peacebuilding role of sport is most fully realized in the absence of armed confrontation between states, for example, under conditions of tension or post-conflict reconciliation. Then the states can really get closer thanks to the interactions of athletes and sports institutions, involvement in joint sports events, etc. Instead, in a state of open hostility and aggression, completely different institutions usually become the main instruments for achieving peace. In the meantime, under the conditions of armed confrontation between states, such peacebuilding tools of the institution of sports as public criticism of the aggressor states for the politicization of sports, lobbying for the isolation of the aggressor states from world sport or the strengthening of restrictions on them, the formation of public opinion among the fan community about the nature of a particular conflict or war, mobilization of financial resources (crowdfunding projects, etc.) for humanitarian needs, etc. can play a constructive role. Thus, sports diplomacy, the demonstration by athletes of their clear position regarding states that undermine peace and security become important. In this way, the world sports community can contribute to countering the politicization of sport and the exploitation of athletes by neo-authoritarian states as tools to propagate aggressive narratives.

Simultaneously, the ongoing activation of the institution of sports on a global scale in the fight for peace and against the aggression of non-democratic states may have new consequences. This refers to the growing risk of a split in world sport, the increasingly frequent holding of politicized sports events (such as the World Friendship Games initiated by Russia), etc. We can observe that the events in the sport – international relations coordinate system are now developing with accelerated dynamics, which requires further study of the issue.

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