

**Interview with Michael Petrou, Chair of the Working Group on Science of the Monitoring Group of the Anti-Doping Convention
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Question : *As Chair of the Working Group on Science of the Monitoring Group of the Anti-Doping Convention, could you give us your opinion on what the main challenges are in the fight against doping in the oncoming years?*

Michael Petrou: The awaited entry into force and implementation of the International Convention against Doping in Sport, adopted by UNESCO, is one of the main challenges in the fight against doping. In addition to the acceptance of the World Anti-Doping Code by sports organizations and international federations, the UNESCO Convention will, in turn, allow Governments to adopt the Code as the basis for the fight against doping in sport, thus achieving harmonization of anti-doping efforts worldwide and providing the legal framework for their actions. We expect that the UNESCO Convention will come into force soon, indicating a new era in the combat against doping in sport.

At this point, I wish to clarify that the Council of Europe put the Anti-Doping Convention in place in 1989, and that this is a strong and legally binding tool for our Governments in combating doping. Through the Monitoring Group of the Convention, suggestions of the advisory groups on Education, Database, Science and Legal issues are adopted, thus providing Governments with both the expertise and the legal background needed in the fight against doping in sport.

In the area of science, the main challenge in the fight against doping is to ensure that gene doping does not become a method of performance enhancement. Scientists, with WADA in the forefront, are currently working to prevent this from becoming a reality in sport. Ongoing scientific research aims towards the development of methods that will permit the detection of gene doping in athletes and at the same time, the working groups of the Anti-Doping Convention currently focus on other aspects of this issue, such as the Fight against the Trafficking of Doping Substances, or the implementation of educational guidelines, ethical issues, etc.

The use of new doping substances that stem from the use of highly specialised fields such as biotechnology, has made their detection much more difficult, presenting yet another challenge in the fight against doping. The current detection technology used by laboratories closely follows athletes using such substances. But, in the near future, with the development of detection technology, I am confident that it will be in the forefront!

Question: *What are the main activities of your Working Group? What does it contribute to the fight against doping globally?*

Michael Petrou: The main activities of the Advisory Group on Science include regular meetings during which current doping related issues are raised and discussed thoroughly and in depth. Attending experts in the field, from the member countries of the Convention as well as other partners such as WADA and the International Federations etc, are committed to fruitful discussions.

Conclusions and decisions reached by the Group regarding doping related issues are forwarded to the Monitoring Group of the Anti-Doping Convention. Following their adoption by the Monitoring Group, decisions are implemented by our Governments and efforts are taken for their dissemination among athletes and their entourage, with the aim of protecting athletes' health, as indicated by the Convention.

The Group has a more global role, given that, as previously mentioned, we work in close cooperation with WADA, the international federations and other bodies concerned with anti-doping. We prepare and submit comments and recommendations on the List of Prohibited Substances and Methods to WADA on an annual basis and

these are taken into consideration by the relevant Committee. When the List is finalised by WADA, the Group advises the Monitoring Group whether to adopt it or not. Similarly, the Group contributes to decisions taken by WADA on other crucial issues aside from the List, by submitting the conclusions of discussions during meetings, once approved by the Monitoring Group.

Question : *At present, do we have sufficient means to detect all substances? Are controls in and out of competition adequate?*

Michael Petrou: By nature, anti-doping efforts lag behind cheating athletes. However, the gap between these athletes and anti-doping initiatives is continuously narrowing, and nowadays we can be confident that almost all known doping substances can be detected. In addition, ongoing research is promising and in the near future anti-doping measures can be ahead of cheating athletes. This can be achieved with the development of analytical methods that are capable of identifying modified “unrecognised” molecules, as well as new techniques for differentiating substances of exogenous or endogenous origin.

In the field of detection of doping substances, the analysis of other biological samples apart from urine, such as blood, saliva, or hair, can significantly enhance the capability of laboratories for this task. Similarly, the development of indirect methods for deterring the misuse of prohibited drugs is progressing and is highly encouraging. Longitudinal examinations of haematological and biochemical markers that are used simultaneously, are potentially effective for identifying cheating athletes.

Testing is another crucial issue in the fight against doping. With the introduction of out-of-competition testing that complements in-competition testing, there is no doubt that testing has become much more effective. However, for this to be achieved a well planned testing programme must be put in place and such a programme must take many parameters into consideration. When planning out-of-competition testing for each individual athlete, the type of sport performed, the athlete’s training programme and competition plans are combined with the pharmacokinetics of the drugs the athlete might use in order to be “caught” when these substances are abused.