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European Heart House, 9 March 2022

Dear Colleagues,

It is with utmost concern that we all witness the current crisis in the heart of Europe. Our support and sympathy is with our colleagues in Ukraine, their families, and the entire population. The ESC, throughout its 70 years of existence, has remained fully committed to scientific and educational co-operation independent of geographical borders and political systems. We are and continue to be unified by our collective aim to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease.

However, after careful deliberation and discussion in the Board, and in the light of continued aggression against one of our member countries, Ukraine, by the leaderships of the Russian Federation and Belarus, the ESC has temporarily suspended the memberships of the Russian Society of Cardiology (RSC) and the Belarussian Society of Cardiologists (BSSC). Also, individuals based in the Russian Federation or in Belarus are currently "excluded from active participation in any ESC event or activity", such as presenter or chairperson roles in ESC congresses.

Importantly, this does not prevent access to educational material, journals, guidelines and any other information and guidance that the ESC disseminates.

Please let us emphasize that this extraordinary measure is not at all directed against cardiologists, scientists, and other ESC members from the Russian Federation or Belarus. They are not to blame for the war. They are our friends and colleagues in the fight against cardiovascular disease.

However, the international community had no choice but to use widespread isolation to deter further aggression by the political leadership of the Russian Federation and Belarus. Isolation of the aggressors includes economic sanctions, exclusion from sporting competitions, cancellation of cultural events, and the termination of scientific collaborations. Sanctions need to be as comprehensive as possible in order to be effective. In this context, the ESC sees the temporary suspension of RSC and BSSC as a necessary measure in a desperate attempt to stop the bloodshed in Ukraine by signalling international condemnation and adding pressure on political leadership in Russia and Belarus.

The ESC very much regrets the impacts of its decision on our cardiology colleagues and friends in the affected countries. However, collectively we continue to hope for rapid resolution of the conflict and peace to be restored, whereupon there would be no need to sustain any measures.

**Our mission: To reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease.**

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The ESC has always emphasised unity across political systems and geographic borders. This unity is not sacrificed and will never be. It remains the priority. However, sanctions are the only measures the ESC can contribute towards ending the war and the loss of lives, health, and humanity that will occur every day as long as the war continues.

On behalf of the ESC Board  
Stephan Achenbach

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