

SPORT INTEGRITY AS A NATIONAL OBJECTIVE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA COMPARED TO THE UK AND FRANCE

Arian MOVILEANU

National Anti-Doping Agency (ANAD), Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
arianmovi12@gmail.com

Purpose of the article: *To examine the legal-institutional framework safeguarding sport integrity in the Republic of Moldova and benchmark it against two advanced jurisdictions – the United Kingdom and France – in order to assess alignment with international standards, identify best practices, and pinpoint gaps that undermine public trust in the authenticity of athletic performance and the “spirit of sport.”*

Methodology: *A comparative legal and policy analysis based on desk research of primary legislation, secondary regulations, institutional mandates, and enforcement practices in the three countries; benchmarking against international frameworks (e.g., WADA Code) and recognized integrity domains (anti-doping, match-fixing, corruption prevention, education, data protection).*

Conclusions: *Moldova’s framework contains important elements but remains fragmented and unevenly enforced. Effective integrity protection requires a coherent national strategy, stronger inter-institutional coordination, clearer mandates, and resourced mechanisms for prevention, detection, and sanctions across doping, match-fixing, and corruption. Restoring public trust depends on greater transparency, education, and consistent enforcement, aligned with European integration objectives.*

Originality: *Provides one of the first systematic cross-country comparisons of Moldova’s sport-integrity architecture with UK and France, linking the “spirit of sport” concept to concrete regulatory design and offering a practical benchmark for policy convergence at national and EU levels.*

Keywords: *sport integrity; legal framework; regulatory institutions; spirit of sport; anti-doping; match-fixing; combating sports corruption.*

JEL Classifications: K23, L83, H83

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of sport integrity has gained increasing attention at the national and international level. In the Republic of Moldova, this topic has become particularly relevant following the adoption of new legislation and the country’s broader efforts toward European integration. According to national and regional analyses from the sources that have been studied, we can state that Moldova has adopted significant reforms aimed at enhancing the legal and institutional infrastructure dedicated to safeguarding integrity in sport (Government Decision No. 886/2024). These reforms include provisions for anti-doping, combating match-fixing, and preventing corruption in both professional and amateur sports. However, the practical application of these reforms remains inconsistent. As a result, the need to evaluate the effectiveness of existing measures and to draw lessons from international good practices such as France and UK has become urgent.

Countries like United Kingdom and France are considered leaders in the development and enforcement of sport integrity frameworks. The UK relies on a decentralized, multi-agency model for safeguarding sport integrity, as outlined in the (UK Anti-Doping Framework Document 2023-2026), which defines the roles, responsibilities, and inter-institutional cooperation mechanisms between UKAD, government bodies, and national governing bodies of sport, while France implements a centralized, state-coordinated system with strong legal oversight, these are Plan National de Prévention du Dopage (PNPD, 2023-2026) and Agence Française de Lutte Contre le Dopage (AFLD). Both models demonstrate the importance of clear responsibilities, transparent procedures, and strategic cooperation between public authorities and sport organizations.

In this context, it is important to examine how Moldova's legal and institutional setup compares to these two established models. Given the growing concerns about doping, manipulation of sports competitions, and the erosion of public trust, this comparative analysis seeks to provide a critical overview of Moldova's current capacity to prevent and sanction integrity violations.

This comparative study therefore aims to identify best practices and existing gaps, contributing to the enhancement of national strategies. In addition, the study may help stimulate dialogue between national institutions and international partners, especially as Moldova works to align with EU standards and adopt more robust mechanisms for protecting the "spirit of sport," as defined in the (World Anti-Doping Code). Ultimately, safeguarding sport integrity supports the broader societal values of fairness, respect, and excellence, which are vital for the legitimacy and future of sport worldwide. The research questions for this review were:

How do the legal and institutional frameworks in the Republic of Moldova compare to those in the United Kingdom and France in promoting and protecting sport integrity?

What practices can be identified to strengthen Moldova's national strategy for combating doping, match-fixing, and corruption in sport within the context of European integration?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article is based on a qualitative comparative analysis to examine the legal and institutional frameworks related to sport integrity in Moldova, the UK, and France. The research is based on a review of official legal documents, government decisions, and institutional regulations in each country. Key sources include Moldova's Government Decision No. (886/2024), UK (anti-doping and anti-corruption laws) and France's (AFLD) regulations. International standards, guidelines were also analyzed to evaluate compliance. Secondary sources included academic articles (McNamee, Parry, Phelps 2020); (Houlihan, García, 2012) and expert analyses from recognized organizations (Jucov, 2024). These materials were gathered from official websites, legal databases, and international sports governance platforms. The study focuses on comparing institutional structures, enforcement mechanisms, and cooperation between agencies. Limitations include varying data availability, particularly for Moldova, and differing national contexts. Despite these, the methodology offers a thorough overview of current sport integrity practices in the three countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the Republic of Moldova, the legal framework for safeguarding sport integrity has undergone significant modernization in recent years, aligning progressively with European and international standards. The cornerstone of this legal system is Law No. 110/2025, which explicitly recognizes sport integrity as a national objective. This law provides mechanisms to prevent the manipulation of competitions, promote ethical values, and ensure governance structures are aligned with international commitments. Notably, Article 2, paragraph (13) of the law offers a comprehensive definition of fair play, describing it as the "loyal acceptance of the rules in a game, including honest conduct in any situation, respect for opponents, referees' decisions, spectators, and the overall spirit of the game, as well as the dignified acceptance of both defeat and victory."

Closely linked to this is Government Decision No. (886/2024), which created the National Platform for Sport Integrity (PNIS), a collaborative institutional mechanism aimed at coordinating preventive, educational, and regulatory efforts. As a result of these measures, Moldova has launched the "REPORT IT" digital reporting tool, enabling athletes, officials, and citizens to anonymously report suspected cases of manipulation or corruption. In addition, regional workshops and training sessions have been conducted across various sports institutions to build awareness and institutional capacity regarding integrity issues.

Complementing this structure is Law No. (24/2023), fully harmonized with the (2021 World Anti-Doping Code), which governs the operations of the National Anti-Doping Agency (ANAD Moldova). Under this framework, ANAD has initiated public campaigns such as the national "Clean Sport Day," conducted awareness activities in schools and sports clubs, and signed cooperation agreements with local authorities to decentralize anti-doping education and monitoring.

Meanwhile, Law No. (82/2017), imposes ethical and transparency obligations on public servants, including those within the sport sector, thus integrating sport governance into the wider national anti-corruption system. These laws are not isolated legal texts but serve as the foundation for a multi-layered integrity architecture. Their coordinated implementation—through national strategies, education programs, and inter-institutional cooperation—demonstrates Moldova's intention to protect fair play, safeguard athletes' rights, and enhance institutional accountability in the context of European integration.

However, when comparing Moldova's legal and institutional approach to the more established systems of the United Kingdom and France, it becomes evident that significant challenges remain regarding implementation, monitoring, and effective cooperation. A clear example is the case of Dorin Balmus, the doctor for the Moldovan national weightlifting team, who received a lifetime ban for sending individuals resembling athletes to provide urine samples at the 2015 World Championships (Euronews 2021). This incident highlights systemic deficiencies in Moldova's anti-doping controls and integrity mechanisms. The absence of robust monitoring allows such fraud to occur, compromising public trust in national sport. Although a legislative framework exists, its practical application is hindered by structural constraints. A primary challenge is the lack of domestically accredited laboratories, which necessitates sending samples to countries like Austria, thereby increasing costs and delaying investigations. Furthermore, the limited budget of the National Anti-Doping Agency (ANAD) restricts the scope of essential educational campaigns. Consequently, increased public funding is critical to enhance operational capacity and expand prevention activities into rural areas and youth sports.

National Legal Frameworks Ensuring Sport Integrity – UK. The United Kingdom has established a solid system to protect fairness in sport, built on a mix of domestic laws and global rules. Instead of relying on a single central authority, the UK uses a flexible, multi-agency network that operates across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. A crucial tool here is the (Gambling Act 2005), which makes betting-related match-fixing a criminal offense and gives regulators the power to investigate suspicious behavior. Alongside this, the UK applies the standards of the (Macolin Convention) to fight the manipulation of competitions. Even though there is no single "Sport Integrity Law," the system works effectively by applying general criminal laws against fraud and the (bribery Act 2010). In the fight against doping, the country strictly follows the (World Anti-Doping Code 2021) through UK Anti-Doping (UKAD), the agency with the official power to manage testing and enforcement. Their current strategy, the UK Anti-Doping Framework (2023–2026), prioritizes education and prevention to keep sport clean. Furthermore, Sport Resolutions UK serves as an independent expert body that handles disputes and arbitration to ensure fair outcomes in integrity cases.

Below, we present a comparative Venn diagram illustrating lessons from two major UK sports governance and anti-doping cases – the Tyson Fury case and the British Cycling case – identifying common governance elements between them (Figure 1).

Between 2017 and 2019, British Cycling faced a major crisis involving serious allegations of bullying, bad behavior, and a lack of openness. As reported in (The Guardian news 2017), this situation triggered a full governance review, which was not a random decision but a procedure grounded in the Code for Sports Governance. This Code, created by the (DCMS), works on a simple but powerful principle: public money comes with conditions. Agencies like UK Sport and Sport England use this framework to ensure that if a sports body wants funding, it must meet strict standards. These include having independent leadership,

financial clarity, and safe ways for people to report wrongdoing. Consequently, when the issues at British Cycling became undeniable, the regulators used the powers granted by the Code to force an independent audit, proving that accountability is a requirement, not an option. The panel assessed the federation's internal governance structures, decision-making processes, and oversight mechanisms, particularly in areas such as board composition, stakeholder engagement, and ethics compliance.

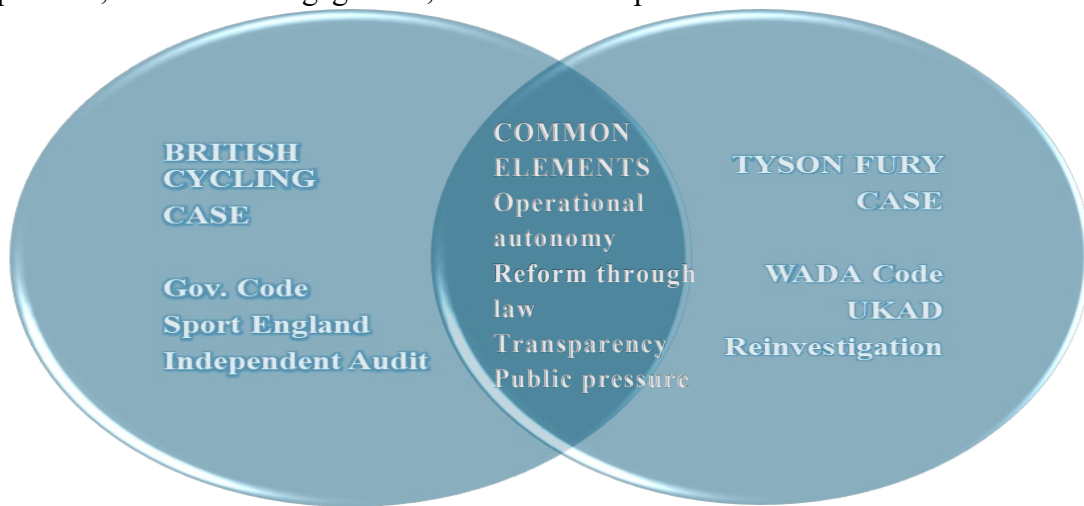


Figure 1. Common elements and differences between two cases in the UK.

Source: Prepared by the author based on the comparison between the Tyson Fury case (2017) and the governance reforms mandated in the British Cycling case (2017).

During the audit process, British Cycling received formal communications from the funding bodies requiring the submission of a detailed action plan within a fixed timeline. This plan had to outline clear steps for aligning with the Code's requirements. Some of the key conditions included appointing at least two independent board directors, implementing a public conflicts-of-interest register, adopting a whistleblowing policy, and publishing regular financial and performance reports. These conditions were not optional. A "payment-by-results" model was enforced, under which up to 20% of British Cycling's funding was withheld until measurable progress was demonstrated. Over time, the organization began implementing the necessary reforms. It restructured its leadership, appointed new independent board members, created an external Audit and Risk Committee, and introduced comprehensive policies on ethics, diversity, and safeguarding. All changes were monitored closely by UK Sport and Sport England, and final approval was only granted after full compliance was confirmed by the independent panel. This process resulted in significant internal reform and contributed to rebuilding public trust in British Cycling. The case serves as a clear example of how legal mechanisms tied to funding can drive real institutional change. It shows that when financial support is conditional on strict governance standards, public bodies can effectively compel national sport federations to adopt responsible, transparent, and ethical practices. The British experience provides a valuable model that could inspire similar approaches in other countries, including Moldova, particularly in cases where public funding is provided but oversight and accountability remain weak.

Example 2 - In 2017, the UK Anti-Doping Agency (UKAD) officially reopened an investigation into professional boxer Tyson Fury following media allegations of possible manipulation of anti-doping test results as it's said in (UKAD news 2017). This decision demonstrated the agency's transparency and institutional independence, especially under external pressure. The legal foundation for this action lies in the UK's anti-doping legislation, which incorporates the World Anti-Doping Code, into national law through the UK Anti-Doping Rules. These rules obligate UKAD to investigate any credible information suggesting a potential violation. In response, UKAD formally reopened the case, despite it having been

closed a year earlier after a private settlement. The emergence of new allegations in the press prompted a legal review under Article 13 of the WADA Code, which allows for the reopening of cases when new significant facts or evidence arise. UKAD notified the athlete and his team, ensuring compliance with the principles of due process and fair trial. The agency proceeded to gather and reassess all relevant medical records and test results from the 2015–2016 period, collaborating with WADA-accredited laboratories for reanalysis. A key point of inquiry included the existence of any informal agreement between the athlete and UKAD, an issue central to evaluating procedural integrity. In keeping with UK legal standards for public information and institutional accountability, UKAD issued official statements to keep the public informed throughout the process while safeguarding the athlete's rights. The institutions involved in this case included UKAD, which led the investigation; the media, which acted as a catalyst for transparency; and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which oversaw the situation without intervening, underscoring UKAD's operational autonomy. While no doping violations were ultimately confirmed, the case exemplified a robust and credible institutional response that reinforced public confidence in the UK's anti-doping system. From the perspective of this article, the Tyson Fury case provides an important contrast with the situation in the Republic of Moldova, where Anti-Doping bodies are still in the process of building institutional independence and legal authority.

Together, this composite legal and institutional environment promotes transparency, ethical conduct, and the protection of athletes and institutions from manipulation and misconduct. After UK system, Republic of Moldova can draw important lessons to strengthen its own sports integrity and anti-doping system. A crucial part is that Moldova should establish effective mechanisms for whistleblowing and conflict of interest management similar to the British Cycling reforms enforced through the UK's Code for Sports Governance. This approach can make national sports bodies in Moldova to adopt responsible and transparent practices. Moldova also needs to build institutional independence and operational autonomy for its anti-doping agency, ensuring it can investigate and act on credible allegations without political interference, as demonstrated by UKAD's handling of the Tyson Fury case. Transparent communication with the public and adherence to due process must be central to this effort to build trust and credibility. By adopting a multi-agency, legally grounded, and transparent approach like that of the UK, Moldova can enhance enforcement, monitoring, and cooperation in sport integrity, thereby fostering a culture of fair play and public confidence in national sport.

National Legal Frameworks Ensuring Sport Integrity – France

France maintains a structured and centralized framework of institutions dedicated to upholding sport integrity, deeply embedded within its public administration and legal system. At the core is the (AFLD), the national anti-doping agency responsible for overseeing testing, investigations, education, and the enforcement of sanctions in accordance with the World Anti-Doping Code. The Ministry of Sports and the Olympic and Paralympic Games plays a strategic role in coordinating national sport policy and implementing governance, ethics, and integrity standards across federations. A key instrument in France's integrity framework is the National Platform to Combat the Manipulation of Sports Competitions, which was established under the Council of Europe's (Macolin Convention 2014). Notably, the Republic of Moldova is also a party to this essential international instrument, having officially ratified the Macolin Convention in 2019. As one of the first EU countries to ratify the Convention, France has demonstrated leadership in implementing cross-sectoral cooperation between law enforcement, sport governing bodies, and betting regulators. The legal foundation of AFLD's mission is enshrined in the French Code of Sport, particularly Articles L.232-5 and following, which define the mechanisms for anti-doping control, procedures, and applicable sanctions in the national legal order.

Complementing these efforts, the Haute Autorité pour la transparence de la vie publique supports sport integrity by enforcing anti-corruption and transparency standards for public officials, including those

active in sports governance. In parallel, the National Financial Prosecutor's Office (PNF) and the Central Office for the Fight Against Corruption and Financial and Tax Offences (OCLCIFE) investigate financial crimes and corruption cases that affect the sporting world:

Below, we present a structured flowchart illustrating France's comprehensive anti-doping strategy in 2023 (Figure 2).

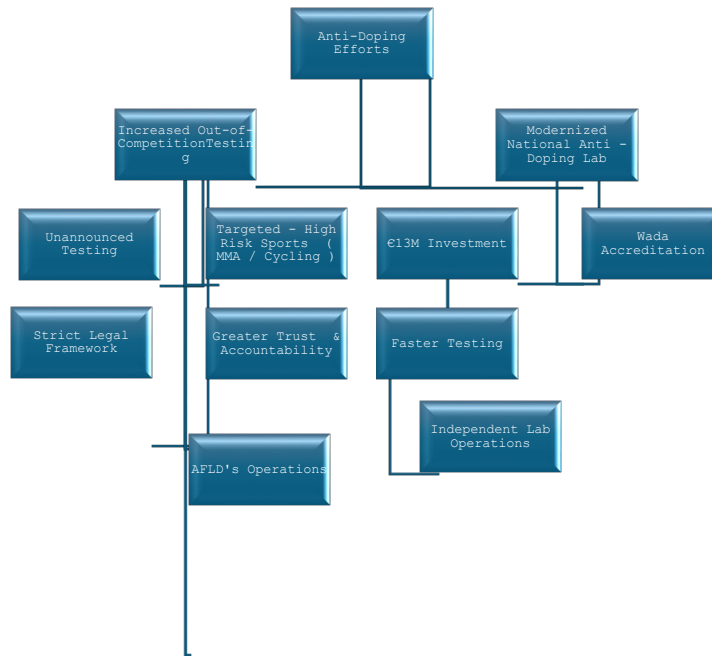


Figure 2: The modernization of France's National Anti-Doping Strategy and the significant expansion of out-of-competition testing.

Source: Prepared by the author based on France's comprehensive anti-doping strategy in (2023).

In 2023, France relocated and modernized its National Anti-Doping Laboratory (LADF) at the University of Paris-Saclay, backed by a €13 million public investment in preparation for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The upgraded LADF, accredited by WADA, serves as a key center for biological testing and scientific research in the field of anti-doping. This initiative was legally grounded in the French Code of Sport, particularly Articles L.232-5 et seq. (République Française, 2025). These provisions define the state's obligations in anti-doping efforts, the responsibility of the AFLD for implementing controls, and the regulatory standards for accredited laboratories. Specifically, the law mandates the French government to invest in and support the infrastructure necessary for anti-doping control. It also provides the AFLD with the legal authority to plan testing strategies, coordinate with international bodies, request re-analysis of samples, and enforce sanctions in alignment with the World Anti-Doping Code. Furthermore, the Code of Sport stipulates that all doping analyses must be conducted in WADA-accredited facilities, a requirement that directly justified the state's financial commitment to building the new high-tech facility.

This legal foundation made it possible for France to allocate €13 million in public funding to relocate and modernize its National Anti-Doping Laboratory (LADF) in 2023 without needing a separate legislative approval process. Having a national laboratory is crucial because it increases the speed and efficiency of testing. When samples are sent to foreign countries, delays can occur due to transport time, backlogs in external labs, or coordination problems. A domestic facility allows for faster analysis, which is especially important when athletes need to be suspended before major competitions. It also reduces costs in the long

run, especially for countries that conduct regular testing or host large sporting events. Beyond logistics, a national lab strengthens operational independence and sovereignty in the anti-doping process. This ensures that a country can set its own priorities and respond quickly and confidentially to potential violations. Moreover, such laboratories are not just testing centers—they contribute to professional training, scientific research, and innovation in anti-doping methods. As a result of this investment, France can now process doping tests quickly and independently, reducing reliance on foreign laboratories, increasing its testing capacity for major events like Paris 2024, and reinforcing public and athlete confidence in the fairness of sport (Le Monde, 2024).

Example 2 – In 2023, the French Anti-Doping Agency (AFLD) significantly increased out-of-competition testing, conducting over 6,000 tests with a special focus on high-risk sports like mixed martial arts, cycling, and athletics. This initiative was not only strategic but legally mandated by the French Code of Sport and the (Macolin Convention 2014), both of which require proactive anti-doping measures and the prevention of manipulation in sports. The French Code of Sport, particularly Articles L.232-5 et seq. (République Française, 2025) and onward, gives AFLD the authority to perform doping controls both in and out of competition. It requires that testing be unannounced, scientifically valid, and impartial, covering all levels of sport from amateur to elite. It also obligates national sports federations to cooperate fully with AFLD, ensuring the agency has legal access to athletes even during training camps or off-season periods. The Macolin Convention, ratified by France, reinforces this legal foundation by obliging authorities to prevent corruption in sport, promote inter-institutional intelligence sharing, and conduct targeted testing in areas of high doping risk. These frameworks were further integrated into France's Olympic preparation strategy by the Ministry of Sports, which provided funding, political support, and coordination, allowing AFLD to implement a large-scale testing program. Out-of-competition testing plays a vital role in maintaining the integrity of sport. Athletes often attempt to use performance-enhancing drugs during training periods and stop before competition to avoid detection, so only testing during competitions fails to catch many violations. Unpredictable, out-of-competition testing closes this loophole by checking athletes when they are least expecting it. It also helps to avoid doping scandals during major international events, protecting the country's reputation and the credibility of its athletes. Focusing resources on high-risk sports allows for a more strategic use of testing budgets, increasing the chance of catching violations where they are most likely to occur. Regular, random testing contributes to a culture of accountability and trust, showing clean athletes that the system protects them and discouraging potential cheaters through the fear of detection.

The French model of anti-doping governance offers valuable insights for the Republic of Moldova as it seeks to strengthen its own sport integrity framework. Currently, Moldova's testing regime is largely reactive and limited in scope, primarily focused on competitions or driven by requests from international federations. This approach, coupled with insufficient legal backing and limited funding, means that out-of-competition testing crucial for detecting doping during training periods is rarely implemented, leaving a significant gap in prevention efforts. Transparency, coordinated inter-agency action, and proper implementation of international frameworks such as the Macolin Convention, which Moldova has ratified, are key to improving the country's ability to prevent, detect, and sanction doping effectively. Another pressing issue is Moldova's lack of a WADA-accredited anti-doping laboratory. Reliance on foreign laboratories results in processing delays, higher costs, and limited control over national testing priorities, in Moldova one test costs around €425 base on Logos Press article (Jucov 2024). By introducing legislative reforms that clearly define the state's responsibilities and allow for dedicated public investment, Moldova could create or co-develop a regional anti-doping laboratory, potentially in partnership with neighboring countries or with EU support. Such a facility would reinforce national sovereignty over doping control, improve turnaround times, and support research and staff development critical elements of a credible anti-doping system.

Crucial data on the annual number of anti-doping tests between Republic of Moldova , UK and France. To illustrate the significant differences in anti-doping efforts and sport integrity enforcement, Table (3) provides a comparative overview of key anti-doping indicators in the Republic of Moldova, the United Kingdom, and France, highlighting the impact of legal frameworks, institutional capacities, and national strategies on the detection rates of doping violations and the overall effectiveness of anti-doping systems across these countries:

Tabelul 1. Overview of anti-doping testing practices, results, and challenges across the Republic of Moldova, the United Kingdom, and France.

Country	Total Number of Tests (Annual)	Estimated Positivity Rate	Relevant Notes
France- (AFLD)	12,044 tests (2023)	~ 0.87%	0.87% of all analyzed samples showed abnormal results. MMA remains at the "alert level"; AFLD implements risk-based testing .
UK- (UKAD)	8,816 test (2023)	~ 0.14%	
Republic Of Moldova (ANAD)	1 0 0	~4.5%	Expensive testing (~€425/test), limited budget, positivity rate significantly higher than WADA average .

Source: Prepared by the author based on material sources.

This table clearly illustrates key differences in testing volume, positive doping sample rates, and institutional resources dedicated to combating doping and ensuring sport integrity. These factors are crucial in understanding the legal and institutional frameworks that shape each country's anti-doping efforts and their broader approach to sport integrity. In terms of the legal and institutional frameworks, the United Kingdom and France have established comprehensive, resource-rich systems, benefiting from intelligence-led testing strategies and the active integration of sport ethics with national policies. For instance, the UK's model, which primarily targets elite athletes, along with France's intense testing and regulatory focus on high-risk sports like MMA, demonstrates an advanced approach underpinned by strong legal infrastructure. Both countries also have more robust anti-doping budgets and institutional support, which allows them to enforce lower doping positivity rates, at 0.14% for the UK and rates that are typically below 1% for other sports in France. These figures reflect the strength of their legal and institutional commitments to sport integrity.

In contrast, Moldova faces significant challenges due to its limited resources and lower testing volume (approximately 4,000 athletes monitored with a positive test rate of 4.5%). Despite the government's ongoing support for the National Anti-Doping Agency (ANAD) and efforts to align with international anti-doping standards (such as those set by WADA), Moldova still lags behind in terms of both testing capacity and legal infrastructure. The country's higher positive doping rate may indicate a lack of sufficient proactive measures, such as the intelligence-driven approaches used in France and the UK.

The table not only highlights Moldova's current limitations but also serves as a roadmap for identifying strategic improvements in its fight against doping, match-fixing, and corruption in sports. By adopting best practices from France and the UK, such as increased funding for anti-doping initiatives, those 2 countries manage to conduct a higher number of annual tests, primarily due to the well-maintained laboratories and testing infrastructure they have in place. This highlights the need for increased funding in the Republic of Moldova to further develop and expand its anti-doping capabilities. Additionally, in order to reduce the doping percentage in the country, it is crucial to implement more awareness campaigns with

a strong focus on education and information about the risks and regulations surrounding doping. Strengthening these areas would not only help Moldova in its fight against doping but also improve its alignment with European standards and its ongoing integration process with the EU.

Conclusions. This article presented a comparative analysis of the legal and institutional framework for sport integrity in the Republic of Moldova, in relation to two benchmark countries: the United Kingdom and France. The study assessed both the legislative progress made by Moldova in recent years and the major shortcomings in terms of implementation, funding, and infrastructure. It highlighted the importance of interinstitutional cooperation, effective sanctioning mechanisms, and public investment in building a fair and credible sports system.

In response to the first research question—regarding Moldova’s alignment with international standards—the findings indicate a formal compliance with many conventions and international codes, yet practical implementation remains problematic. As for the second question—focused on necessary measures to strengthen sport integrity—the proposed solutions include the creation of a national or regional anti-doping laboratory, increasing ANAD’s budget, expanding out-of-competition testing, and adopting governance policies similar to those implemented in the UK.

Looking ahead, the Republic of Moldova must focus its efforts on translating legislative reforms into concrete actions through sustained investments, institutional independence of ANAD, and greater public awareness. Only through a strategic approach inspired by successful European models can the country rebuild public trust in the authentic spirit of sport and contribute to a performance culture rooted in fairness and merit.

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