

ANNIVERSARY OF THE FINNISH DANCESPORT FEDERATION

Dear Mrs President Liusvaara, please allow me to address you as I normally would: "Most appreciated Leena!" And as a consequence, all others present as "Dear friends!"

I am here to convey the greetings and the congratulatory message of the Presidium and the Membership of the World DanceSport Federation.

Whatever made it possible that an organisation gets to celebrate a milestone anniversary on the same day it presents a perfect showcase of what it is all about, I suspect that it was more than just coincidence or the Gregorian calendar. Maybe Finnish ingenuity and efficiency helped it along – just a little?

So here we are, about to have us a big bash of a party – to which I shall raise my glass and say "Kippis!" All the more so after I have Google-translated "Happy Birtdhay!" into Finnish! I would definitely not be able to pronounce that.

I had a brief look at your organisation's history from when it all started on 16 March in 1976. The fact that what is now the Finnish DanceSport Federation was created through a merger is probably most revealing about the spirit of your founding fathers. In a sport where – at least in the past – the dividing has been more commonplace than bringing together, this first Finnish step towards unity was both bold and visionary.

I know we will get to see the results of many other steps that your organisation has taken since in the opening ceremony to today's evening session and in the GrandSlam Latin.

It will be a spectacular showcase for what DanceSport has developed into in this country. Wheelchair dancers, Hip Hoppers and others moving expertly to music will share the floor with the world's best in the Latin dances. It will be the

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embodiment of what we envision as the future for our sport, of what we are actually working towards under our 2020 Vision project.

That we have to come to Finland to get a first glance at what the redefined product “DanceSport” will look like everywhere a few years from now is typical. You Finns are always leading-edge! You were front-runners in the development of technology and in education.

That is why we always look to you for inspiration. That is why the WDSF Presidium just loves to add your competence to the work of our Commissions. And that is why I am very proud to be able to consider you – dear Lena, dear Antero and others present in this room – my “smart friends from Finland.” Now I raise my glass and say on behalf of the entire WDSF: “Happy Birthday, FDSF!” And: “Kippis!”