

**TWENTY YEARS AFTER *MECA-MEDINA*:
THE ENDURING LEGACY OF THE
CJEU'S SPORTS LAW REVOLUTION**

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INTRODUCTION

On 18 July 2006 the Court of Justice of the European Union delivered its judgment in *Meca-Medina and Majcen v Commission*, a case that transformed the legal foundations of sport in Europe. What appeared at first glance to be a technical dispute concerning anti-doping rules tested the limits of EU law's reach over sport: the Court rejected the notion that sport could be isolated from EU law as a matter of "purely sporting rules", and instead articulated a new, context-sensitive approach rooted in proportionality and functional analysis.

Two decades on, *Meca-Medina* remains a landmark in both EU sports law and competition law, reshaping how the autonomy of private regulatory systems is reconciled with the demands of the internal market. Its influence extends far beyond sport, into professional regulation, network governance, and the place of private governance within the EU legal order.

This volume celebrates the twentieth anniversary of *Meca-Medina* by offering the first comprehensive reassessment of its origins, doctrinal development, and lasting impact. Bringing together leading experts from different backgrounds, it traces the evolution of the *Meca-Medina* doctrine from its roots in *Wouters* to the December 2023 trilogy (*Superleague*, *ISU* and *Royal Antwerp*) and the more recent July 2026 judgments. These include *Rogon* and *RRC Sports* on players' agents, *FIGC* and *CONI* on disciplinary sanctions, and *NADA Austria* on data protection in anti-doping enforcement. It also examines *CD Tondela*, which separately tested the proportionality paradigm in the field of financial governance.

The unifying thread across the contributions is the double effect of *Meca-Medina*. It introduced a case-by-case proportionality test that integrates sporting regulation into the logic of the internal market, and in doing so it reshaped how the Court reconciles the autonomy of private regulators with the coherence of EU law as a whole.

The inclusion of *Wouters* as a dedicated part underscores that *Meca-Medina* was not a rupture but rather a refinement – a translation of the *Wouters* principle of regulated self-governance into a domain characterised by both commercial and social objectives.

The book is divided into three parts, each reflecting a distinct dimension of this legal transformation:

Part I, *Genesis and Analysis of Meca-Medina*, is a reading of the case from the inside: the judicial reasoning, institutional setting, and the historical decline of the “purely sporting rules” doctrine.

Part II, *Meca-Medina in Jurisprudence and Doctrine*, examines the application of the proportionality paradigm in later cases such as *TopFit and Biffi*, *Superleague*, *ISU*, *Royal Antwerp*, *RRC Sports* and *Rogon*.

Part III, *Consequences for Sports Governing Bodies’ Autonomy*, analyses the impact of the EU case law on the international sports federations’ regulatory framework.

The volume is addressed to academics and practitioners, who will find an authoritative synthesis of two decades of scholarship and case law, and to policy makers and sporting associations, who will find informed analyses of how EU law constrains and enables governance in sport.

By bringing together the voices of those who made, interpreted, and criticised the *Meca-Medina* ruling, the authors offer a reflection on the evolution of EU sports law as a field of dialogue: between autonomy and legality, market and regulation, competition and cooperation. In doing so, they show how EU sports law functions as a laboratory for understanding broader patterns of EU governance, particularly in a context where competences are shared and negotiated between the Member States and the EU institutions.

Twenty years after it was delivered, *Meca-Medina* is still the doctrinal starting point for any analysis of how EU law engages with the autonomy of sports governing bodies. The chapters that follow trace how its proportionality test has since been applied, refined, and in places tested to its limits.

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